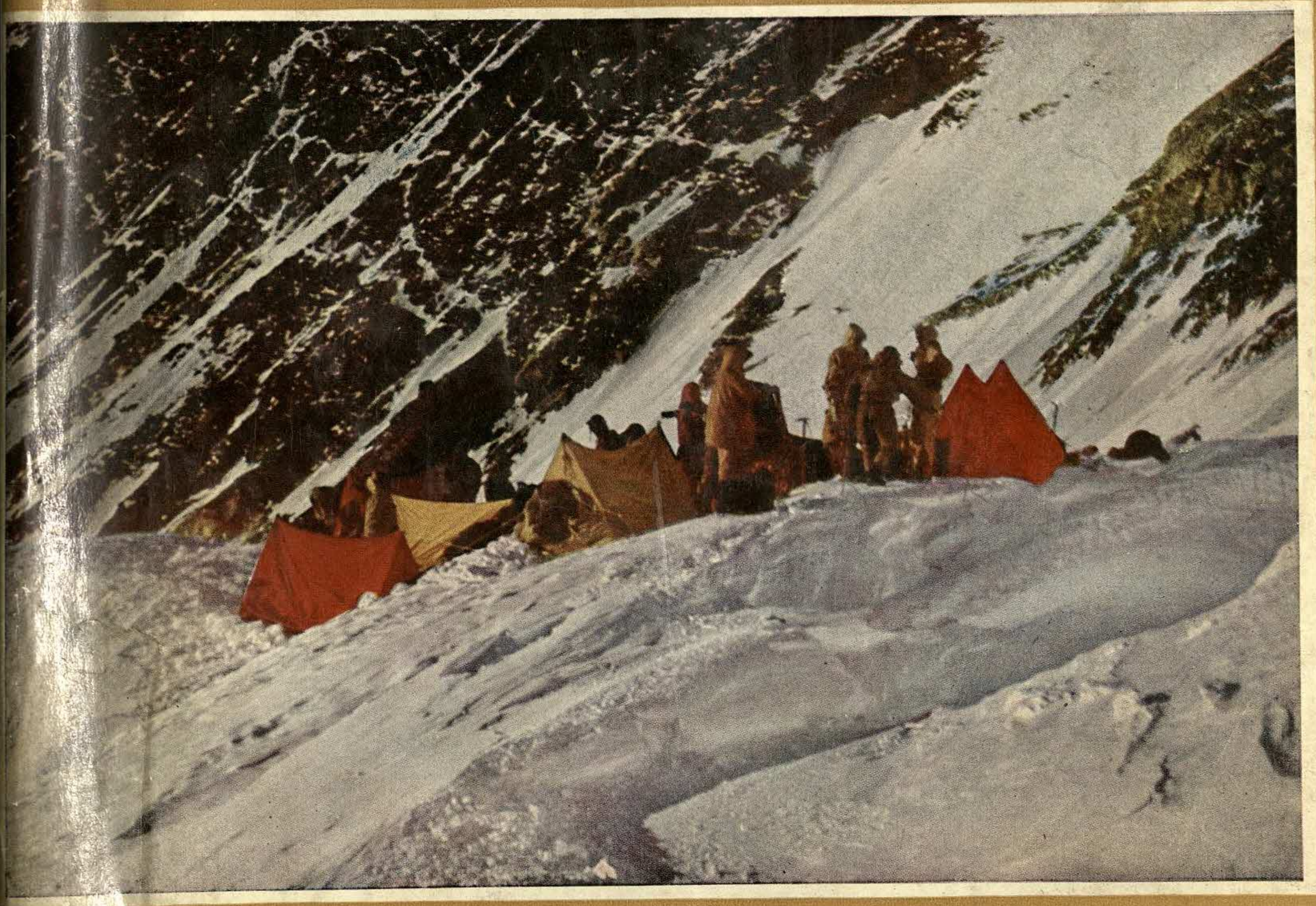
THE EVEREST ADVENTURE

STORY OF THE SECOND INDIAN EXPEDITION



major john dias

THE EVEREST ADVENTURE

2098



Camp VI on the South Col (25,850 ft.)

THE EVEREST ADVENTURE

STORY OF THE SECOND INDIAN EXPEDITION

By
MAJOR JOHN DIAS

Foreword By
S. S. KHERA

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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To

My Wife

Joan Frances

FOREWORD

As this book goes to press, the world is applauding the remarkable triumph of the third Everest expedition. Even as one joins in the universal congratulation, one is reminded of the promise John Dias made to Everest. "We will come again", he had said. John sleeps in his grave in Delhi but his spirit is with them upon Everest.

This book is John Dias' story of the second Indian expedition to Mount Everest. It is a saga of brave men upon a mountain, stretching themselves to the limit of their endurance and being forced back from within a few hundred feet of their objective by the one hazard that can set at naught every plan and effort on Everest, namely, the weather upon Everest. I shall never forget the long hours of anxious waiting for two critical days towards the end of May, waiting for a message, any message, but more than anything else for a message saying that all the members of the team were safe.

The first expedition to Everest was undertaken in 1960 under the leadership of Gyan Singh. This expedition reached 28,300 feet, missing the summit by just 700 feet.

Immediately afterwards, permission was obtained from the Government of Nepal for another attempt in 1962. Our first business was to find a new leader, for Gyan Singh was not available for the second attempt. John Dias was the obvious choice. He had been on several major climbs, including Cho Oyu, and had all the qualities of a leader for an attempt upon Everest. The decision was unanimous.

In consultation with the new leader, the team was quickly selected. In this respect, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling is a steady and increasingly rich source of enthusiastic, trained young climbers from every part of the country.

John Dias tells his fascinating tale with the modesty and restraint that mark a true sportsman. He tells of the team spirit and the common effort of all the members ; of the trials upon the Icefall, that first great barrier before Everest ; of the heroic struggle upon Lhotse Face, where a brave and cheerful Sherpa lost his life and where a whole rope of

climbers fell 700 feet and survived ; of the performance of each member ; of the endurance feats upon South Col ; and of the gallant bid of the team for the summit. One of the many memorable anecdotes in the narrative describes how Kohli, Sonam Gyatso and Hari Dang spent three consecutive nights at 27,650 feet, more than half the time without oxygen. Another tells of Ang Tharkay, "an old man radiating strength and honesty" who carried a load of 40 pounds to the last camp at 27,650 feet and spent three days at South Col, a fine feat in itself. The feat of Gurdial Singh and a Sherpa who spent six consecutive nights upon the dreaded frozen wildernesses of South Col, most of the time without oxygen, is described in vivid detail. John Dias also talks with admiration of Suman Dubey, a teenager, the youngest climber ever to join an Everest expedition who reached South Col (25,850 feet, over a spur at 26,000 feet) and remained there for three nights.

The story has much else besides which would thrill the reader, even if he has never been near the Himalayas in fact or in thought. The pictures are a joy to see ; they are a small selection from the many hundreds taken upon the expedition.

New Delhi
May 26, 1965

S. S. KHERA
Chairman
Indian Mountaineering Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all members of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation are due the grateful thanks of our team. They sponsored us, had confidence in us and were with us in spirit throughout. They also kept our near and dear ones informed regularly about our welfare. Only we know how hard they have worked and how much they have worried, deliberately keeping themselves "behind the scenes". They are: Mr. S. S. Khera, I.C.S., Mr. S. Boothalingam, I.C.S., Prof. M. S. Thacker, Lt. Gen. Sir H. M. Williams, Mr. H. C. Sarin, I.C.S., and Mr. A. K. Ghosh, I.C.S.

We thank our Ambassador in Nepal, Mr. Harishwar Dayal, I.F.S., Mrs. Dayal and all the members of our Indian Embassy staff and their wives for the help, kindness and hospitality extended to our team both on the mountain and during our stay at Kathmandu.

We thank His Majesty's Government of Nepal for permitting us to enter their beautiful country, climb their mountains and associate with their charming people.

I owe a big debt to the brother officers of my unit, the Eighth Battalion, the Garhwal Rifles—"The Fighting Eighth"—for looking after and loving the men I have the proud privilege to serve, while I was away on the mountain. In scrawled, almost illegible Hindi and Roman Hindi, I received many letters from all ranks of the "Eighth" wishing us the best of luck. They meant so much to me, because only by "belonging" can one attempt to command.

I salute a fine team of members and Sherpas. We took a terrible beating on the mountain, but our team-spirit was never broken. I have every hope of climbing again with them.

Finally we thank all those who helped in any way to make this venture possible.

J. D.

CONTENTS

MALLORY'S MOUNTAIN

Da Norbu opened the zip of our tent and, grinning from ear to ear, crawled in with a kettle of steaming hot tea. In the process, he spilled some on to Gurdial's sleeping bag. It did not seem to matter—nothing seemed to matter at that time except that Nima's life had to be saved. This was a fine morning on the South Col, after three days and four nights of vicious weather. On a day like this, our summiters were sure to make it. The sky was a brilliant blue, so intense, yet so delicate in colour that we felt it would smash like a glass bowl into a thousand pieces if we raised our voices above a murmur. We had been constantly peeping out of the tent from the time light first touched the South-East ridge. The wind had eased off. The crazy flapping of the tents had stopped. Even the disdainful snow-cap of Everest was absent. "*Burra Sahib aj top lega*",* said Da Norbu.

Ang Tshering joined us with two mugs of piping-hot porridge.

It was six o'clock now on May 30th, 1962, and there were five of us on the Col. Our summiters, Mohan, Hari and Sonam, had spent two nights on the Col with us and two at the summit camp, Camp VII (27,650 ft.)

Yes, Everest would be climbed today.

But our story does not begin here. The story of Everest is an old one—just over a hundred years old—beginning in 1852 when a chief computor of the Survey of India, Radhanath Sikdar, found that "Peak XV" was the highest mountain in the world.

Then comes the saga of the determined and courageous assaults from the North where great climbers made mountain history, where they fought good fights, lost, and came back to fight again.

This was the mountain which the immortal George Leigh-Mallory was determined to climb "because it was there". Even today the spirit of Mallory reigns over the Everest region. One recalls the words of Sir Francis Younghusband about Mallory in his book *The Epic of Mount Everest:* "Mallory was himself the very embodiment of the 'Everest Spirit'. And to get him away from Everest before Everest itself had hurled him back, you would have had to pull him up by the very roots of his being."

*Today, we will make the summit.

To us who came to grips with Everest, this was Mallory's mountain. Surely Mallory had done something much more than reach the summit of Everest when, almost forty years later, men were still inspired by his spirit, his courage and his pure approach to mountains!

Next in the story of Everest are the attempts from the South—Shipton's brilliant reconnaissance, the daring Swiss attempts in 1952, the outstanding British success of 1953, the Swiss triumph of 1956, and our gallant Indian attempt in 1960.

To all those who went to Everest before us we owe a debt of gratitude because it is from them that we have learnt about the mountain, its moods and its problems, and the demands it makes on men's minds and bodies.

It is a long story, and we are happy to take our little part in it. The story does not end with us. An American team is attempting Everest next year* and maybe we will ourselves follow them.

Our part of the story begins at Jaynagar on 16th February, 1962.

*Two members of the American expedition reached the summit of Mount Everest on May 1, 1963, and four others on May 23, 1963. Both the parties reached the summit by different routes.

THE APPROACH

Our Sherpas from the high mountain districts of Solo and Khumbu met us at Jaynagar. They further confounded the chaos of a thousand packages and revelled in it, for surely, amidst all the confusion, some of them would get off with light loads. Without them, this dreary railhead on the road to Everest would have been depressing.

They came by the hundreds, with their broad grins and their good-natured pranks, their babies and belongings, their laughter and tricks. We knew these men and had learned to like them on previous trips. They would carry for us and climb with us; but now they set about testing their Sahibs in a time-honoured tradition.

The Sahibs, however, calmly puffed at their pipes and cigarettes and discussed the weather, leaving the field to the friendly yet commanding and efficient figure of Ang Tharkay, the Sirdar. This veteran has been on eleven expeditions with Eric Shipton alone, including the 1951 reconnaissance that opened the Southern route to Everest which made its ascent possible. There he was, sorting, weighing, allotting loads—the personification, if that is possible, of Himalayan expeditions. He was too old a hand to be fooled.

This did not prevent the Nangias—minor Sirdars, each in charge of a hundred porters—from trying. They swore and cursed and feigned indignation at the loads, hoping to fox Jungalwala and Chowdhury who, however, knew Gorkhali and returned their banter in good measure. Terrified of being outcursed, the Nangias immediately changed to Tibetan and pleaded with Sonam Gyatso, a 'kindred' soul who speaks Tibetan on the rare occasions when he is not asleep. But he slept through their curses, unperturbed by the heat and the mosquitoes in the dilapidated rest house.

Guru sounded frantic even in his impeccable prose. Someone had stolen the camera tripod. It was found being used as a clothes-line ; but where on earth was the Paillard Bolex ? More schoolmasterly expletives followed. His Sherpa Jeeves, Nima, was caught photographing his girl friend with it, but the lens-hood was on and the camera unloaded.

Our doctors, Ashoke and Sue, sorted out their stock-in-trade, coolly puffing at their pipes, as on Sunday afternoons at the Golf Club. Some Sherpas were already complaining of stomach pains and headaches, most of them not genuine but just to see what the 'Amji Sahib' would produce from his bag of tricks. The Sherpa women

made constant demands on sticking plaster which they stuck in small pieces all over their faces as a sure omen of good luck. Cough syrups and cough pills were disappearing at an alarming rate.

O.P. and Sumi argued with Thondup, the Sherpa cook, a Himalayan 'institution' who had fed more expeditions than the average age of our party. He turns an omelette to perfection, though eggs and sugar disappear in his efficient kitchen with distressing rapidity as he is too generous and good natured to stop his hungry kitchen boys. But O.P. and Sumi are astute quartermasters and there was the usual game of who gets confused first, ending, as always, with the Sherpas roaring with laughter.

Hari stopped brooding about life and the rifles that had to be left behind long enough to misappropriate a jeep from the bazar despite the driver's protests. The jeep disappeared in a cloud of exhaust smoke and dust towards the border, a mile away, where a customs official proved conclusively that we could not enter Nepal for a week.

Mohan and K.P. were up to their necks in equipment : tents, kit, boots, ropes, kerosene oil. A jerrycan of kerosene was missing. A Sherpa woman, infatuated by the bright yellow plastic, bribed a Sherpa with promises ; but virtue triumphed with help from Mohan. There were occasional shouts as a Sherpa woman tried to use a pitched tent for an obvious urgency or when porters lit a fire near the oxygen bottles. But everything was gradually brought under control.

The signallers, Balakrishnan and Vaid, set up their mysterious apparatus, gathering a pavement-throng of curious by-standers. There was momentary panic when the aerial was found to have been used to tie up loads and torch cells were produced in place of signal batteries. But a powerful succession of the best in Malayalam and Punjabi oaths put things right.

A pretty Sherpa girl rolled a pair of sparkling eyes at a Nangia and got off with a light load; a grunt from the alert Ang Tharkay, however, sufficed to undo the mischief and the episode was dissolved in a tinkle of hill giggles.

The approach march from Jaynagar commenced through the paddy lands of the plains. The mountains lay obstinately hidden behind a northern haze which only a shower of rain would dispel. How drably different was this from the approaches to the Garhwal and Kumaon mountains with their foothills a bright emerald in spring, a mature green in autumn and violet laced with a white frill in winter !

The promise of the Nepal Himalayas is, however, greater and all the miles of uninspiring flatness of field and village from Jaynagar vanished at the first intimate glimpse of the forests and foothills of Nepal after a sharp thundershower. We were

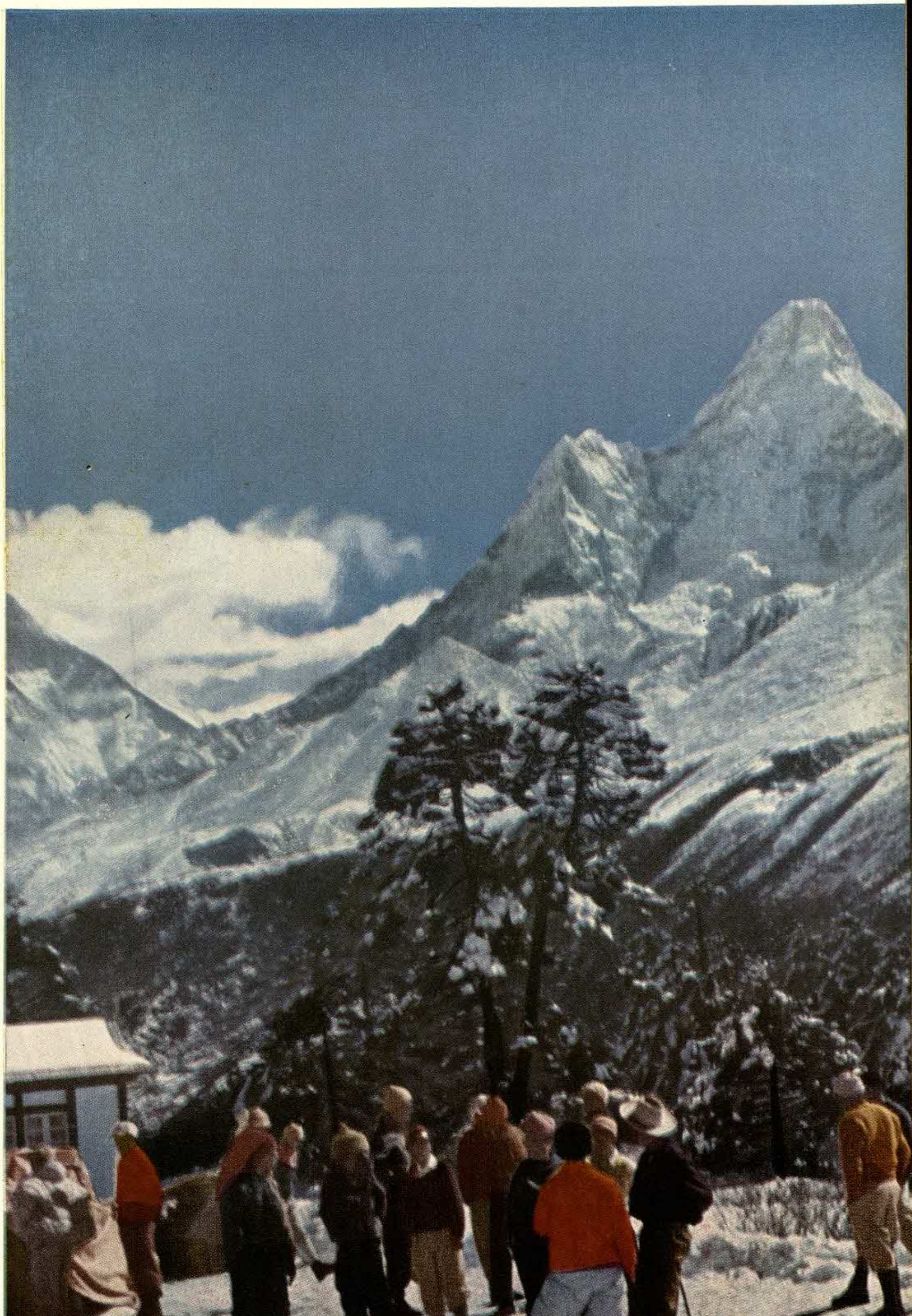


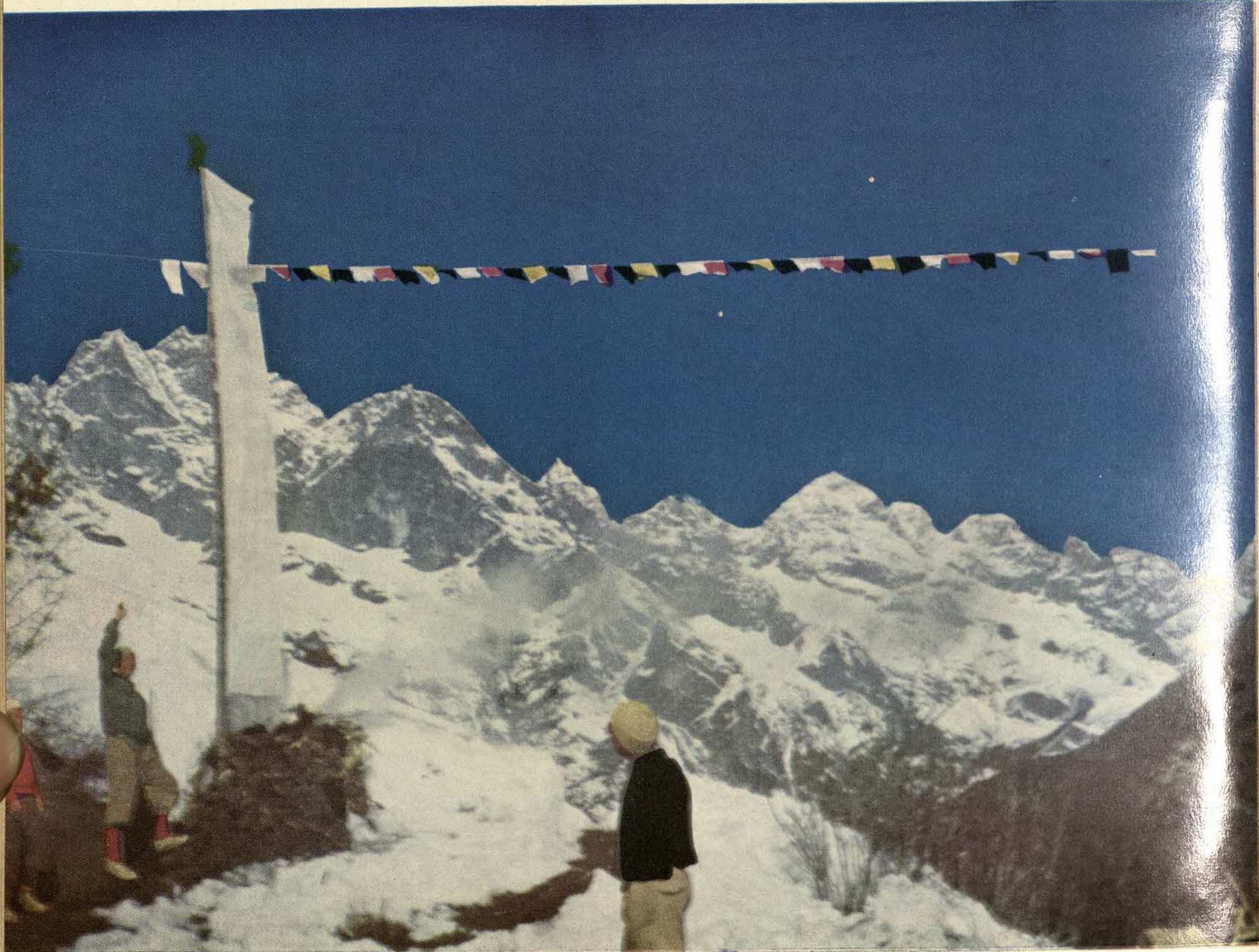
The evening sun on a camp site. The shades are of autumn, although it is still early spring, giving a feeling of being in the mountains already.



From the top of the Jantar Dham—'the home of magic'—one catches a glimpse of Everest disdainfully blowing its olympian plume of driven snow

The visitors' hut at Thyangboche with Ama Dablam in the background





Surely the gods could be bribed with coloured prayer flags!

thrilled by the sound of a barking deer surprised by some strange jungle occurrence and felt vaguely pleased as a nightjar purred its monotony, a slug of black in the moonlight.

Across the Siwaliks of Nepal, the forests seemed to burn with blossoms of *semal* (silk-cotton) and *dhak* or flame of the forest. The air was heavy with the fragrance of camphor, *kachnar* and wild jasmine; but even this was surcharged with the vapours of *chang* and *rakshi*, local brews with which the porters drown their sorrows and fatigue, and the even more penetrating emanations of their own high personal odours to which one gets only gradually accustomed.

Across the foothills, the route plunged into narrow, steamy valleys where thickly terraced fields and scrub-covered crags echoed to the shrill screaming of blue-headed and rose-ringed parakeets and the song of the demure black oriole. Green barbets vied with the discordant crescendo of the brain-fever cuckoo.

We passed through cultivated hillsides and densely populated villages, meeting an occasional covey of *chakor*, the beautiful hill partridge, and groups of friendly Chettris and Tamangs who man our Gorkha regiments. As we entered deeper into the mountains, a mauve blush of saxifrage blossoms carpeted the floor of the forest from which rose mossy oaks and arboreal rhododendrons in crimson bloom. Higher still, the mists flowed formlessly, like haunting music, over exposed ridges.

Laughter lurks just below life in the hills and we shared in the spontaneous mirth of men and women singing as they cut fodder or fuel. We were enchanted by the exotic birds and shared the task of a young girl hewing a man-sized log, to earn a smile full of gratitude and blessings. We halved loads with a young urchin who carried twice his own weight, and felt ashamed of our comforts to see the hard lines of suffering etched on an old woman's stubbornly cheerful face.

We reached Okhaldhunga, a district headquarters, above which rises Jantar Dham, literally 'the home of magic'. Across the forested Jantar Dham lie the high mountains of Solo Khumbu. We forgot the dust and smells of terraced hills and the stench of our sweating porter train in the thrill of frosted earth and swaying fir, of grass crisp and pale after an austere winter, the goodly smell of resinous needles crushed underfoot, fresh snow and gurgling water.

Here the mountains claim their own and the worries of the world fade away with each upward step. Strolling over alpine meadows and looking down at the deep, broad valleys, one could forget all care and marvel at the few primulas (P. Bellidefolia and P. Denticulata) at one's feet that braved the early spring snow. Looming large on the scene is, of course, Everest, the centrepiece of the mountain chain that screens the horizon.

Solo and Khumbu are Buddhist districts and on every rise and summit, in every village and on every track, are symbols of the Enlightened One : the *gumpha* and the chorten, the 'mani' wall and the prayer flag proclaiming to all that pass the one catechism : *Om mani padme hum.* Who can help but believe in such a country ?

Bathing in the icy cascades of glacial torrents, climbing in a lather of clean sweat, resting in the lee of 'mani' walls, we got closer to our goal each day. The Sherpas sloughed off their foothills' despondency and the flutes came out to serenade the mountains with their plaintive airs.

Notwithstanding the prosperity ushered in by Tenzing's ascent of Everest and the growing vogue of Himalayan climbing, Solo Khumbu and its Sherpa people retain an air of arcadian simplicity and happiness. Shangrila is an outworn idea, but it does spring to mind because these mountains and valleys do correspond to the secret retreat for which the questing mind of discontented Man has always craved.

The flowers waited as eagerly as we did for the melting of the snows to assert their life through the frozen soil. But the Himalayan whistling thrush and the *niltava*, the short-billed minivet and the blue magpie followed us and lightened our loads as we marched further and rose higher each day, admiring the few bold rhododendrons, alpine blossoms and the living things that kept us company, too impatient like ourselves to await the first kiss of the spring sun.

We passed *chang* shops where our Sherpas foregathered, reunited with friends and family and drowned their sorrows, imaginary or otherwise.

One of our Nangias started the day drunk as a lord and must have been seeing double as he always reported his hundred porters present when only fifty had passed the morning's check point. Towards the evenings, he could just about count up to one and religiously reported himself to my tent to say life was grand and he had no idea where his hundred porters were. I can still see his Tibetan cowboy hat at a rakish angle, his leather riding boots, his cocky air and his twinkling eyes—a happy soul to whom life meant nothing if it was not long spells of drink.

We passed Namche Bazar tucked away in a re-entrant, covered with two feet of snow, the most sophisticated village in Khumbu. Thami, where Tenzing herded yak and dreamt his dreams, lies close by. Above Namche are two famous villages Khumjung and Khunde—where Ang Tharkay and his brother Dawa Tenzing were born. From the hillsides, old women and little children rushed down to ask what expedition it was, where it was going and who was the 'Burra Sahib'. They had a right to know for had they not given their husbands, sons, fathers, brothers and lovers to the moun-

tains time and time again ? Each village has its set of fine Sherpas and its traditions and in each house one finds mementos of past expeditions.

At last we crossed the conifer-covered ridge in a driving snowstorm and were soon at the Thyangboche monastery (13,000 ft.). Mulk Raj and C. P. caught up with us here, bringing with them the remainder of our equipment.

Sonam put up a huge white prayer flag as well as a series of smaller coloured ones. A mound of juniper bushes was burnt and as the smoke curled up to touch the prayer flags, shouts of *che che* rent the air. Could the gods be bribed into giving us good weather ?

Something has changed and we wonder what it could be. Perhaps we have become bigger, better men, the sky our personal possession, the mountains our personal gods. Wherever the eye turns is fulfilment ; in the hurtling blue flash and whistle of the monal pheasant and its cousin, the blood pheasant; in the sneeze of the tahr and the burrhel among the steep rocky crags, in the sly roving of the musk deer and the endless quartering of the heavens by the lammergeier and griffon vultures. All life seems to find willing protection in this haven of peace and goodwill.

There is peace too in the chanting of the monastery prayers, in the ritual tolling of bells, the blowing of conch and horn, and in the face of the Incarnate Lama who says his prayers each day and presides over the prayer wheels, turned by water mills, invoking the deities to grant us good weather. Above all, there is a strange peace fraught with challenge in the frieze of high mountains around us with Everest rising behind the curtain of Lhotse and Nuptse. There is a strange fascination in all this and a certain contentment. Everest has always been there. We alone are new.

ACCLIMATISATION

The air is dry and rarefied at Thyangboche. When the afternoon clouds rise to consume the sun's warmth in their amorphous chill, the rills of melting snow that criss-cross the slopes around the monastery and the wooden hut in which we stayed, cease their friendly gurgle, and a brittle frost cramps the air. Throats go hoarse and conversation is carried on in modulated coughs.

We stayed in the timber-hut constructed by the hospitable Incarnate Lama of the monastery from donations by various expeditions and visitors. Perched neatly on a gentle ridge with its huge chorten and its pagoda-shaped roofs, its lamaseries, nunneries and yak-pasture, Thyangboche must be one of the most beautiful mountain retreats in the world.

Above its bells and conifers, the ridge rises in steep rock and ice aretes to the 22,340 feet high Kangtega peak, inaccessible above its sheer rock pedestal.

Below the cluster of plank-roofed huts that surround the monastery, the ridge sweeps in forested terraces of birch, rhododendron and fir to the deep defile of the Dudh Kosi which here joins its torrential thunder to the green and grey waters of the Imjya Khola from the glaciers of Everest.

Our acclimatisation period was to last for three weeks and was planned in three stages, each of a week's duration. During the first stage, parties were to climb from Thyangboche to heights of about 16,000 feet and return to Thyangboche the same evening. During the second stage, parties were to camp at about 16,000 feet and climb to about 18,500 feet. In the third stage, parties were to camp at about 18,000 feet and climb up to about 19,500 feet.

I had noticed on previous expeditions that Sherpas need acclimatisation just as much as others. It is a fallacy to think that because some of them live at twelve to fourteen thousand feet they do not need to acclimatise or that they acclimatise sooner. For all Sherpas to acclimatise, we split them into three parties, each of which would accompany a party of members. The same parties would work on the mountain together. This ensured not only acclimatisation, but also members and Sherpas getting to know each other, gaining confidence in each other's ability and good relations being established before we tackled the mountain. The parties were so divided that they were equal in experience and technical capability. They were constituted as under :



Painting in the Thyangboche monastery



Painting in the Thyangboche monastery

Party I

Commander — Dias
Members — Jungal, Chow, Hari and Sue
Sherpas — Sirdar Ang Tharkay and thirteen Sherpas

Party II

Commander — Mohan
Members — C. P., K. P., and Sumi
Sherpas — Assistant Sirdar Sonam Girmi and thirteen Sherpas

Party III

Commander — Guru
Members — Sonam, O. P., Mulk Raj and Ashoke
Sherpas — Phu Dorje I and thirteen Sherpas

This accounted for forty-two of our forty-five Sherpas. The remaining three were old Thondup the cook, whom I intended to keep at Base Camp, Tshering Lakpa the Assistant Cook and Dorje, a kitchen boy, both of whom would form the kitchen staff at Advance Base Camp.

We selected three areas for the three parties to work in. One was in the Tawache area, another was in the area of Awi and the third was above Dingboche. Party commanders were given full freedom to move around wherever they liked if the snow conditions in a particular area were not suitable for acclimatisation training. Snowfall the previous winter seemed to have been exceptional as the Thyangboche area was covered with three feet of it.

In the first week, I conducted lectures on oxygen and training in the use of oxygen equipment. During the second and third weeks, members and Sherpas were encouraged to take out oxygen and masks and get used to the discomfort of wearing a mask as well as carying oxygen bottles in addition to their normal loads. In Delhi, we had harassed our scientists so much that one of them, after a serious discussion of 'Ps', 'Vs' and 'Ts'* burst out: 'My dear Major ! You are obviously not a student of science !'

I was not worried about the performance of any member at high altitudes since most of us had been beyond 24,000 feet before. What we did need was practice in carrying loads. This we had done throughout the approach march, each member

*Pressures, volumes, and temperatures.

carrying from 25 to 35 lbs. During the acclimatisation period, we carried more than forty pounds and saw to it that our Sherpas carried more than fifty pounds.

Time at Thyangboche never hung heavy. There were birds to be identified : the bold laughing thrush, the rose finch, the red-flanked bush robin, the crested tit, the collared bush-chat, the blood pheasant and the monal. There were animals to be stalked and photographed : the shy musk-deer, the tahr, the lonely wolf and the snow-leopard. There was the fragrance of juniper fires for those who sought the warmth and comforting crackle, the excitement of mail from home and the ritual audience with the Incarnate Lama.

Hari and Guru spent happy days photographing tahr, that superb guide-class climber of the Himalayan goat world, flourishing in Khumbu, thanks to religious protection.

I could slowly feel the team-spirit building up as members and Sherpas climbed together more often. We made it a point to get to know each Sherpa by name, to study his moods and also judge his technical capability.

I had advised each member to select his 'number two' from among his party of Sherpas as it would not always be possible to have a member as 'number two'. I hoped that all forty-two of our Sherpas would make the South Col and kept telling them so. Some youngsters amongst them needed a lot of technical training. They did not know the use of rope, ice-axe, crampons, or how to belay, but depended entirely on sheer strength and sense of balance.

Tawache is a very fine mountain but a difficult one, deserving of a major expedition. I believe Sir Edmund Hillary is trying it next year. Awi is another difficult peak which was climbed last year by a German team which attempted Pumori. The Yellow Needle and Lobujye peak always offered enjoyable climbs.

One morning we watched a mallard drake struggling for life in the Imjya Khola, having collapsed during the migration back to the Central Asian breeding grounds. We helped it to resume its broken flight and pondered over the vast distances covered and swift speeds attained during migratory flights. How many of these birds must be losing their lives over the large mountain barriers !

After three delightful weeks of acclimatisation, we followed the Imjya Khola to our Base Camp below Everest, eating baked potatoes, drinking *chang* and swapping yarns and smiles with the Sherpa men and women along the way. It is a four-day march with the landscape more rugged and imposing each day. At the high village of Dingboche (14,000 ft.), juniper bushes alone had survived, while the summer yak-huts of Lobujye were deep in snow. Lobujye is on the Khumbu glacier, and long before

one reaches the glacial ice of Everest, two marches away, one senses the change in the scale of the country. The mountain monarchs of Thyangboche, Taweche, Kangtega and Ama Dablam, all recede farther and lower ; the rocky disarray of the Khumbu glacier's old debris, teetering seracs, gaping crevasses, hanging glaciers plastered on the Nuptse wall and the now dominant cone of graceful Pumori all speak of the mighty things to come.

Two more days of morainic travel, serenaded by the melancholy double whistle of the snow-cock, and we were facing the gigantic chaos of the Icefall frame, the devil's cauldron of boulders that was to be our Base Camp on the Khumbu glacier. The yellow-billed choughs and honking ravens, who were to be our only companions for weeks to come, watched and circled our camp curiously.

With members and Sherpas working to the subterranean rumbles of the glacier underneath, and avalanches peeling off the surrounding mountain sides, Base Camp soon arose with its tents and wind-breaks, a satisfying home away from home.

Everest was ours for the next two months.

THE PLAN

There are four distinct topographical features to be negotiated on Everest :

1. The Icefall from 17,500 feet to 20,000 feet : technically difficult and crawling with objective dangers. Technical difficulties could be considerably eased by the use of wooden planks, aluminium rope and wire ladders and fixed ropes.

2. The Western Cwm from 20,000 feet : an easy walk.

3. The Lhotse Face : 22,000 feet to 26,000 feet : technically not as difficult as the Icefall but here altitude has its effect. The answer to this is good acclimatisation as no expedition can have enough oxygen for all Sherpas and members to use while negotiating and ferrying on the Lhotse Face. Extensive fixed lines must be put on the glacier, the couloir and the Yellow Band.

4. The South-East ridge : 26,000 feet to the summit. The main problem here is the establishment of as high a summit camp as one can get on the narrow ridge. The use of oxygen must be planned in detail and a strong support party must leave the South Col as early as possible on D-day-minus-one.

Phases

Our plan on Everest was a four-phase one :

Phase I — Establishment of an Advance Base Camp in the Western Cwm (based on Base Camp).

Phase II — Establishment of a camp at South Col (based on Advance Base Camp).

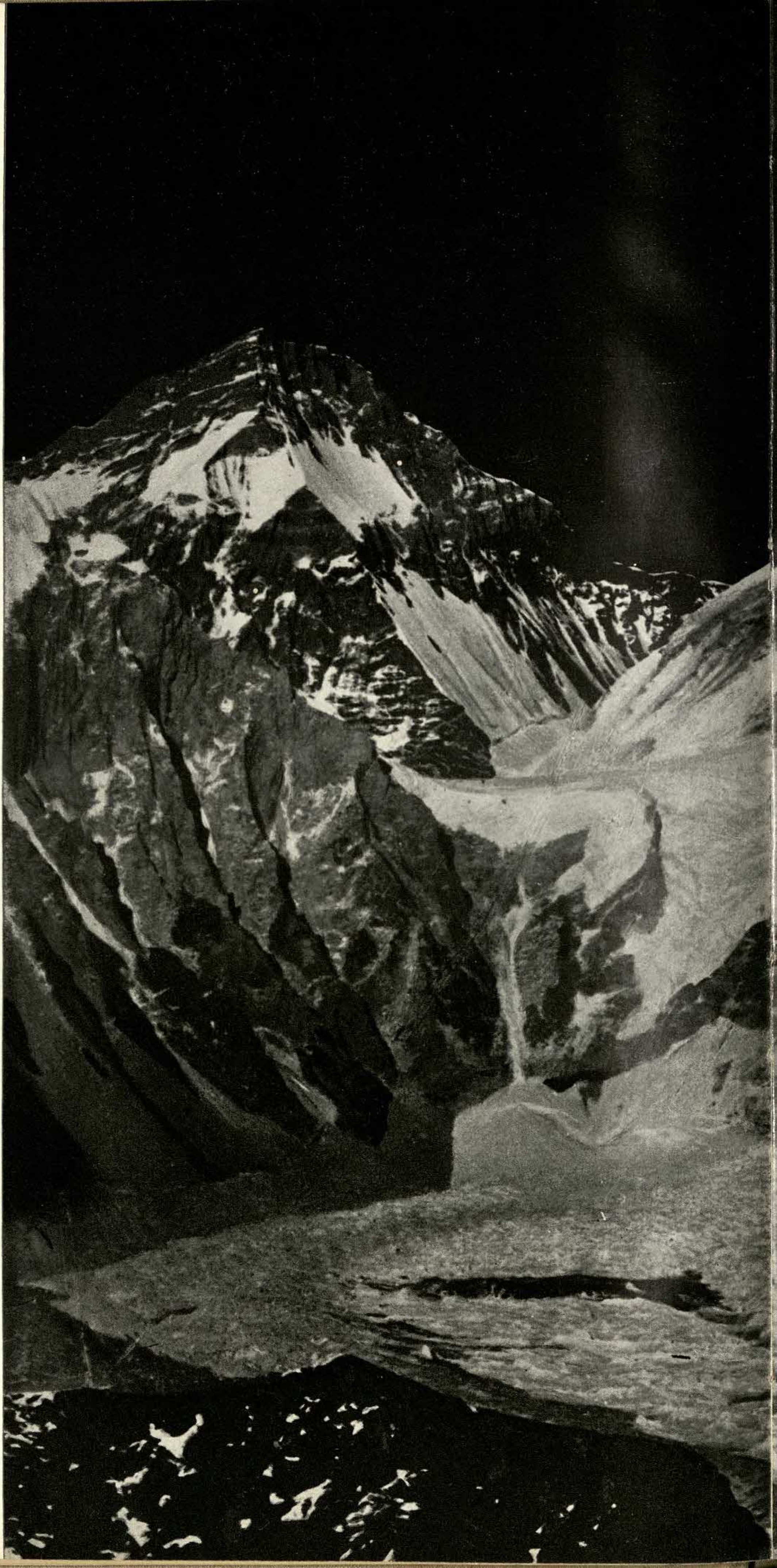
Phase III — Attempt on the summit (based on the South Col).

Phase IV — Evacuation.

Phase I : The technical problem in this phase was the establishment of a porterable route through the Icefall. The first party was to tackle the Icefall, establish Camp I, approximately at 19,000 feet, and go up to the lip of the giant crevasse. The second and third parties were to continue acclimatisation training in the Pumori area.

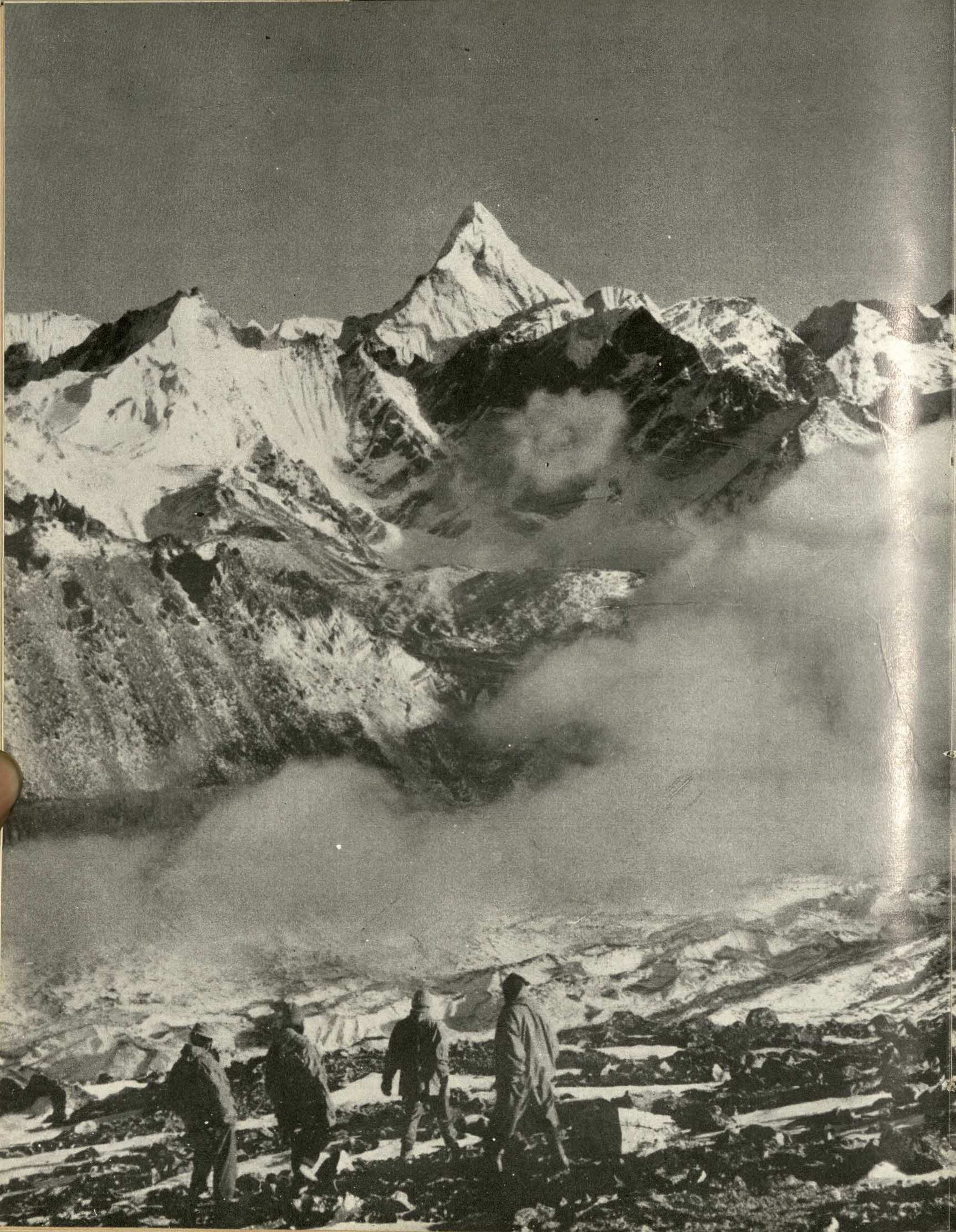


Beautiful Pumori



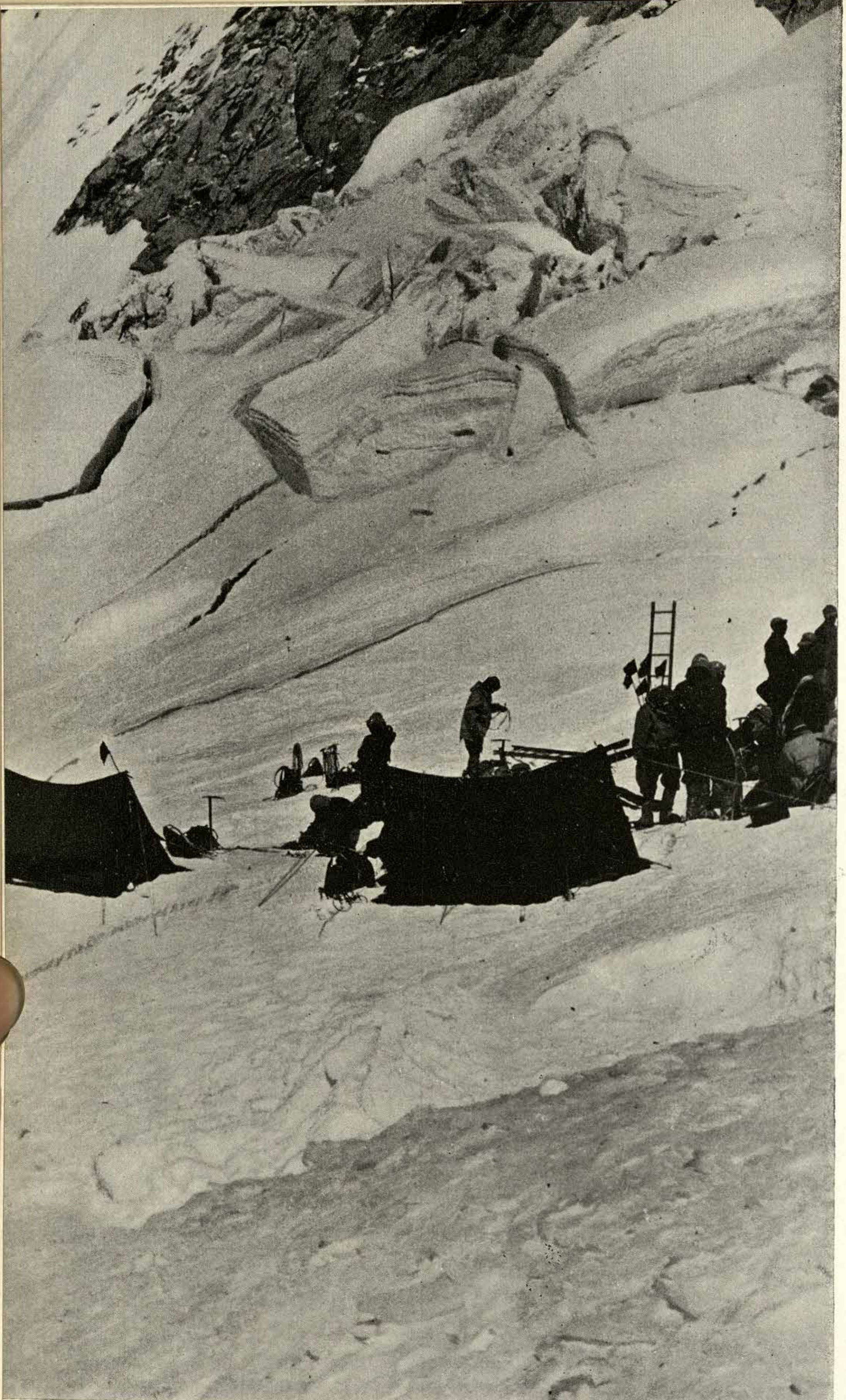
The Everest massif





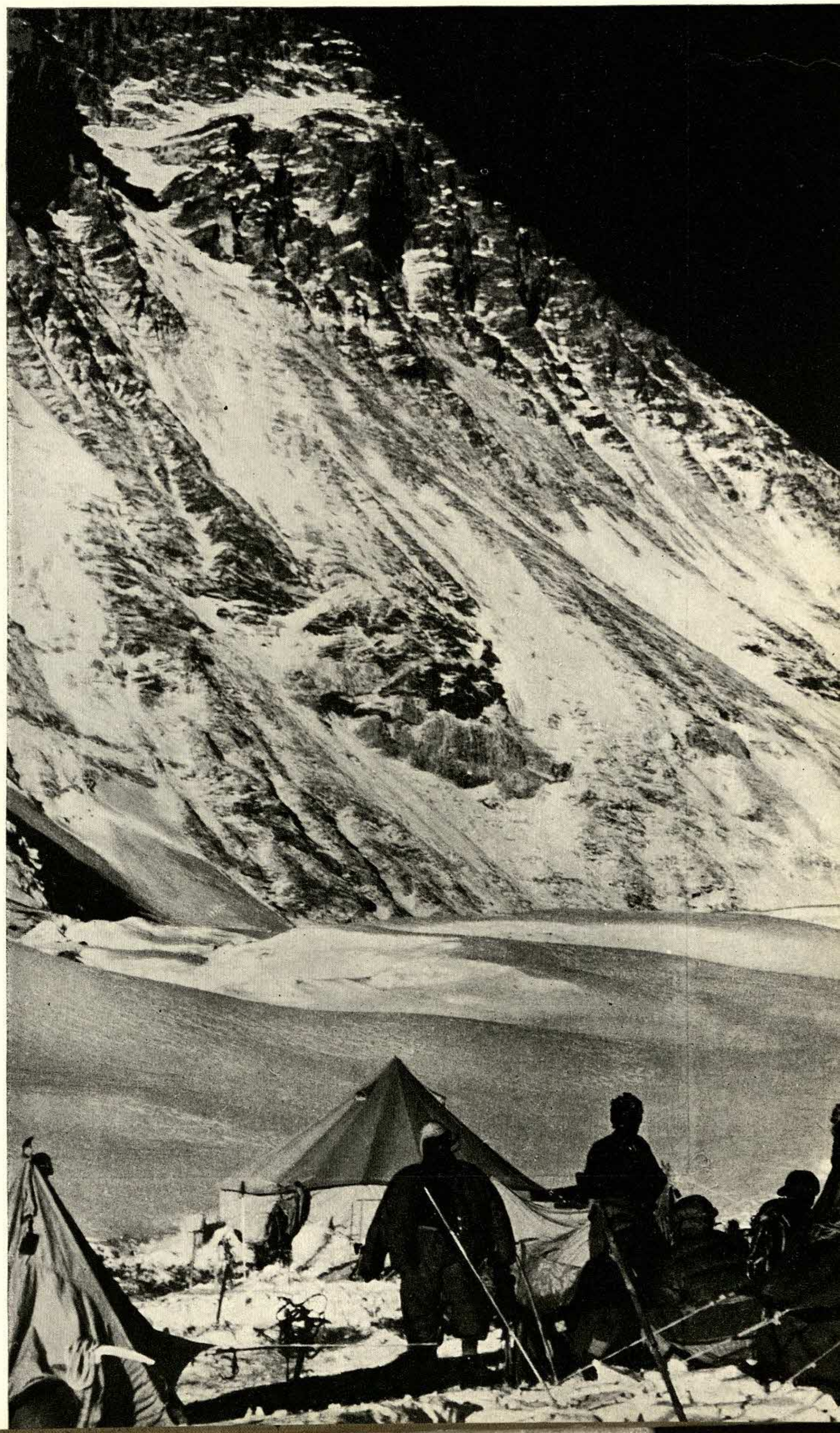


Clouds and mountains



Camp I (19,000 ft.)

Camp III (21,100 ft.)





Carrying wooden planks and aluminium ladders on the Icefall

Once the lip of the giant crevasse had been reached, the second party was to tackle the giant crevasse. The first party was to rest at Base Camp and the third was to start ferries to Camp I.

After the giant crevasse had been negotiated, the third party was to make a route through the Cwm, establish Camps II, III (Advance Base Camp) and IV, as well as report on the condition of Lhotse Face. Meanwhile, the second party was to have its turn of rest at Base and the first would ferry to Camp II.

This system of one party working, one ferrying and one resting ensured that all members and Sherpas got their equal share of work and rest.

Our time-estimate for this phase was fifteen days.

Phase II : The technical problem in this phase is the Lhotse Face consisting of the Lhotse glacier, the Lhotse couloir and the Yellow Band. The three parties were to work as follows : One ferry from Base Camp to Camp II, another ferry from Camp II to Camp III (Advance Base Camp) and the third to work on the Lhotse Face as well as maintain itself from Camp III. Parties would relieve each other every four days. Between Camp IV and the South Col, we intended to have another camp, Camp V, at approximately 24,000 feet. (Please refer to sketch P facing page 24).

This system, besides giving all an equal share in the work, also prevented members and Sherpas from exposure to high altitudes for too long a stretch. Our time estimate for this phase was twelve to sixteen days, depending on the weather.

Phase III : Once the South Col route was established, we intended sending two major ferries to the South Col carrying sufficient food, fuel, tentage and oxygen for two three-man summit parties. After these ferries, the first summit and support parties would move to the Col, try the summit and return. The second summit party would only try the summit if the first failed. Our time estimate for the ferries was from a week to ten days. (Please refer to sketch Q facing page 25).

Total Time Estimate : The total time estimates were therefore : Phase I : fifteen days (15th April) ; Phase II : sixteen days (May 1st) ; Phase III—ferry : ten days (May 11th) ; Summit : 12th to 30th May.

Phase IV : We intended to evacuate all equipment from Camp V (24,000 ft.) and the lower camps. Evacuation from Summit Camp and South Col is normally not possible as both the summit and support parties are by that time much too exhausted.

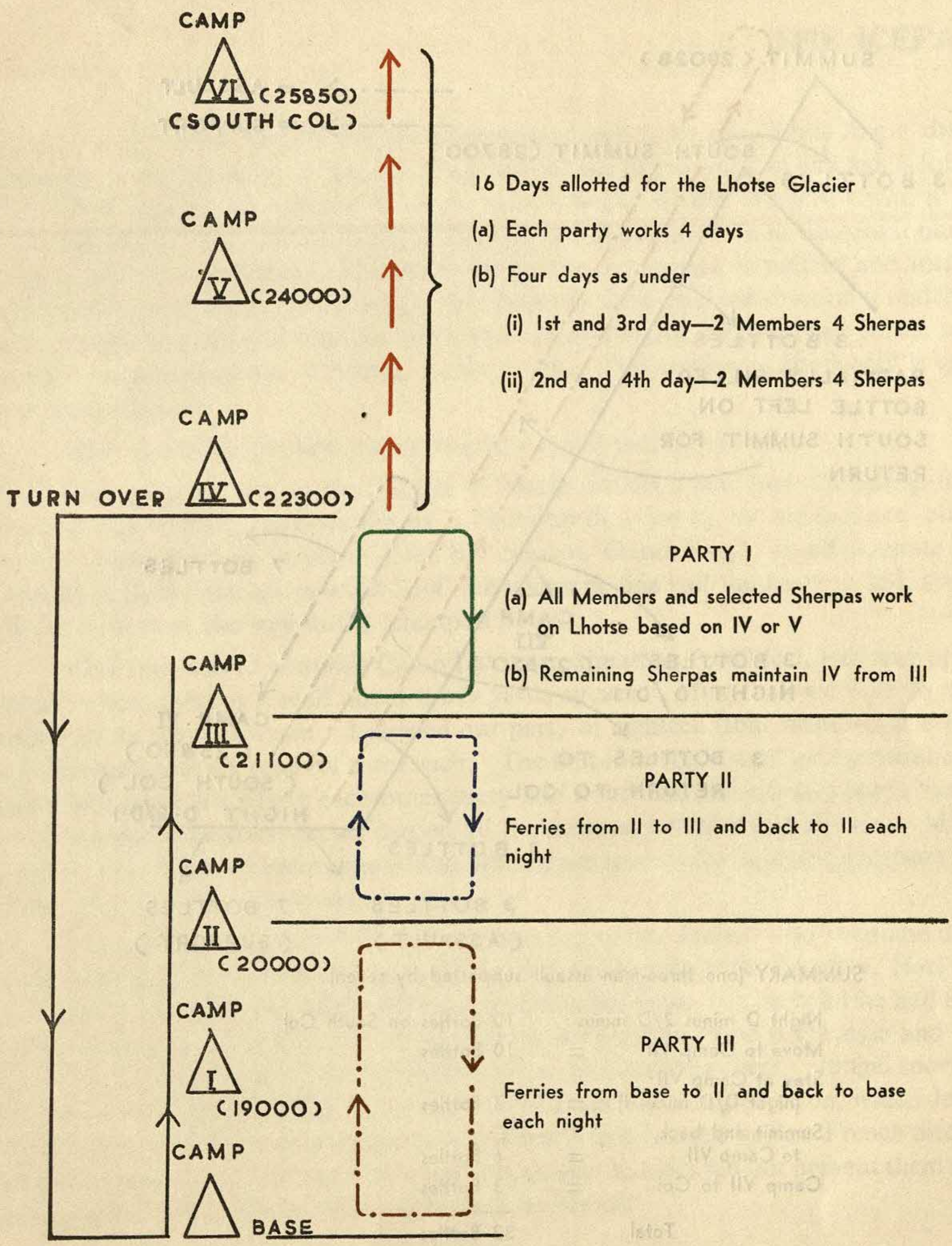
An evacuation plan is essential, to ensure that most of the equipment is got off the mountain or else there is a tendency to just leave everything and run away—the very thought of rock and ice at this late stage is obnoxious.

We had planned for small ferries to go up to Camp V and bring equipment down to Camp III, from where one major ferry would take it on to Base Camp.

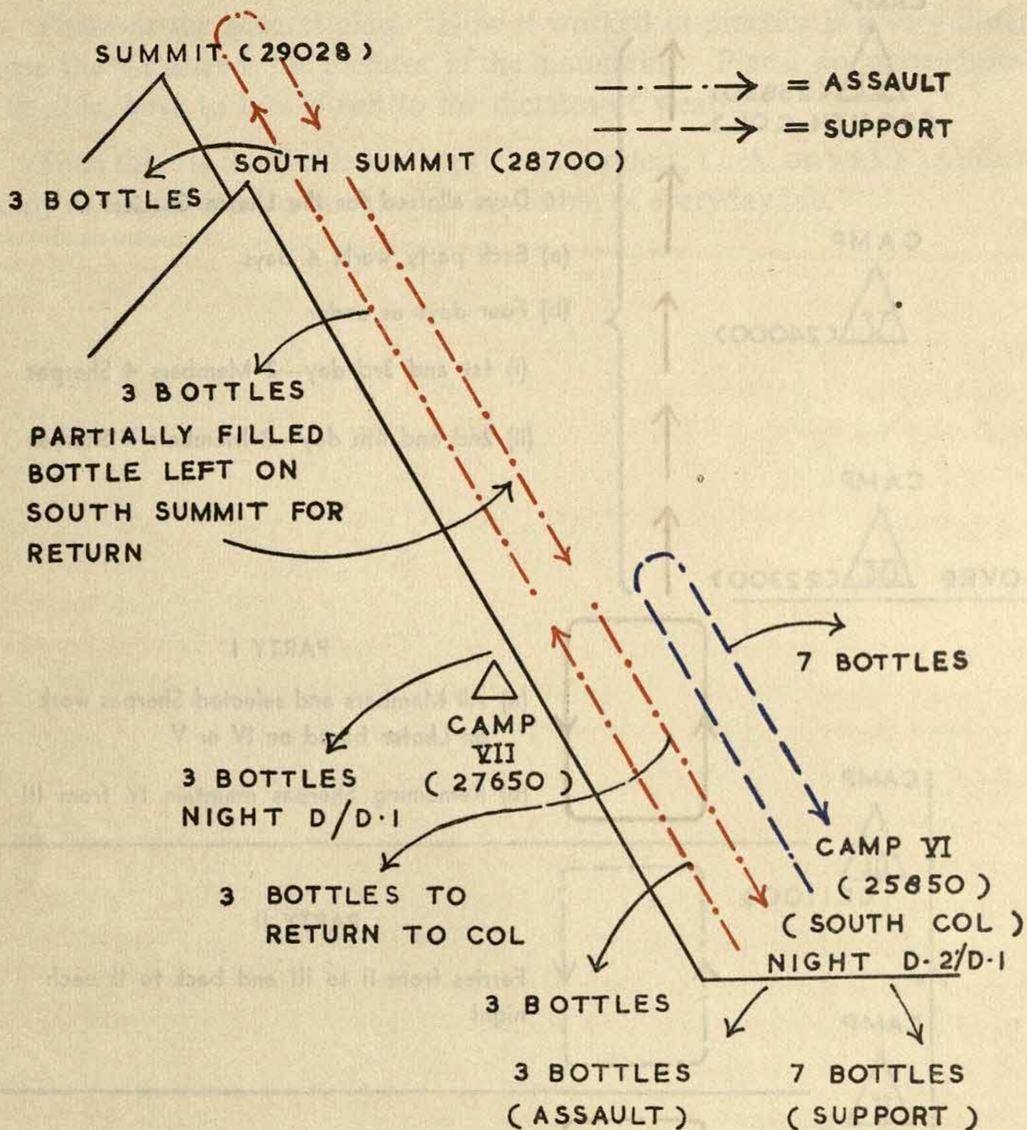
This was the general plan. How it worked in practice is a very different story because the weather is the dictator in the mountains. Plans, no matter how thorough and flexible, have to bow down to the dictates of weather.

Then there is that fickle and capricious goddess, Luck, on which so much depends not only in the mountains but also in the drama of everyday life.

SKETCH 'P' (ILLUSTRATES PHASE II)



SKETCH 'Q' (ILLUSTRATES ASSAULT)



SUMMARY (one three-man assault supported by seven)

Night D minus 2/D minus :		10 Bottles on South Col
Move to Camp VII	=	10 Bottles
Stay at Camp VII (night D/D minus I)	=	3 Bottles
Summit and back to Camp VII	=	6 Bottles
Camp VII to Col	=	3 Bottles
Total		32 Bottles

THE ICEFALL

The Khumbu Icefall plunges ravenously down from the clouds like a dragon intent on devouring all in its descent. The Icefall, one of the worst of its kind, is formed as the Khumbu glacier descends from the serene silence of the Western Cwm, a relatively flat stretch of glacier unwrinkled by crevasses and seracs. In its descent it plunges over a rock step underneath and the resulting broken surface is twisted and tortured into a nearly impassable barrier by the simultaneous stress and constriction it undergoes as it plunges through the vice-like bottleneck formed by the Nuptse Wall on the south and the western shoulder of Everest to the north. This section of the Icefall is called the giant crevasse.

The Icefall is the first major hurdle on the path to Everest.

Our party set out on the last day of March amidst much back-thumping, handshaking, well-wishing, jests and shouts. Thondup lit a fire by his kitchen and offered a silent prayer for our success. Even our mascot, Gorak Singh, an affectionate goat brought to Base Camp as 'meat on hoof' but whom no one had the heart to kill, accompanied us part of the way to the 'crampon point'.

Our task was to establish Camp I at approximately 19,000 feet, half way up the Icefall, where there is a shelf about thirty yards square. After that, we were to reach the lip of the giant crevasse. I divided our party of eighteen (four members and fourteen Sherpas) into six ropes of three each. The first four ropes were led by members as pathfinder ropes (to relieve each other every half hour) and the last two ropes were to be of Sherpas. Between us, we carried all the necessary climbing equipment—Manila rope for fixed lines, wooden planks and aluminium ladders for bridging crevasses, ice-pitons and wooden snow-pegs.

Hari, Jungal and Chow did an excellent job on the Icefall. So keen and determined were they that we almost made Camp I on the evening of the first day. Hari wore a dilapidated Gorkha hat which must have seen better days. In its band he had stuck feathers of various game birds. A gust of wind blew these into a crevasse and only curses from Jungal and Chow prevented him from retrieving them. Jungal sported a Swiss-pattern night-cap while Chow had a very French-looking beret on, which Jungal envied saying he (Chow) was trying to look French just because he flew French aircraft. Both Hari and Chow were suffering from sore throats but this did not prevent them from puffing some evil-smelling cigars every time we rested.

We plunged ahead up the progressively difficult and torn surface of the Icefall, cutting steps, hacking platforms for wooden planks and aluminium ladders, fixing hand-rails or fixed lines with pitons into the blue ice.

In early April, the movement of the Icefall is not very noticeable, but there was enough movement, grunting, groaning and creaking to give each one of us a nasty jolt. One cannot help but feel that the Khumbu Glacier is a living thing, guided and propelled by malevolent and demoniacal forces. It demands more than technique. It requires an understanding of its variety and potential.

The objective dangers are varied and many, and the climber soon realises that luck counts much more than mere technique.

Every time a ferry went into the Icefall, I was never at ease till all returned to camp. I found great consolation in praying to our Lady of the Snows. It is really fortunate that in spite of so many climbers having negotiated it, no one has been killed.

We returned that evening tired but happy at a good day's work having been done. At the crampon point, Kipper and Dorje, two of our kitchen boys, met us with hot tea in vacuum flasks. It was just getting dark and we had to find our way to Base Camp with the help of the torches they brought. It became a tradition on the expedition that every party which went up into the Icefall was met at the crampon point with tea. We looked forward to these meetings and the smiles and laughter of our hard-working, happy kitchen boys who were very much part of our team.

Early next morning, we awoke to the voices of some members and Thondup discussing menus. Food planning is a painstaking and thankless task. The miserable 'food member' tries to cater to all tastes, and, since there were fourteen members, there were fourteen different tastes. One swore he 'just couldn't stand sardines' while another stated he 'could not live without them'. On every expedition, the 'food member' is steadily cursed and a stage is reached when he is blamed even for bad weather !

More tedious than catering for varying tastes is the actual quantitative requirement calculation. "Straight maths", said O. P., "Just pure mathematics—everything in life works down to mathematics". Jungal did not agree with this point of view. He insisted that mathematics and women had nothing to do with each other. C. P. and Sumi joined in the discussion with full gusto—all four of them sampling a fruit juice tin each. Chow chipped in with the Air Force point of view saying, "Pongos have no clue on the subject." I felt sorry to break up the party and the very interesting topic but then there was work to be done and our fruit juice stock was not unlimited !

We set out determined to make Camp I. As we climbed, we looked across the Khumbu Glacier towards the ridge of Pumori, up which we could see our other two



A sinking ice block gives us a nasty fright at Camp I



On the Yellow Band just after crossing the Lhotse couloir

parties climbing, continuing their acclimatisation training. We made Camp I that evening where Hari and I, along with three Sherpas decided to stay, while Jungal and Chow were to go back to Base with our remaining Sherpas and bring up more assault equipment as the route beyond Camp I seemed very badly shattered.

Camp I was no place to spend a night. It is exactly half way up the Icefall and somehow one manages to hear almost every beastly sound the ice-fall can produce. Hari suggested we stuff our ears with cotton-wool and go to sleep. In the early hours of the morning, we both awoke as we felt the tent had moved and heard a dull thud below our tent. We shouted to our Sherpas thinking they would be completely shaken, but they had slept through it all ! Hari lit a candle, took out his diary and made a note which he passed on to me : 'Suggest the following headline in papers : EVEREST LEADER, ONE MEMBER AND THREE SHERPAS DISAPPEAR MYSTERIOUSLY AT CAMP I. YETIS SUSPECTED CULPRITS.'

We found the cause of the thud was that a huge block of ice on which both our tents were pitched had sunk about three feet. It was a beautiful morning and we watched the changing colours on Pumori, Lingtrentse, Khumbutse and the Lho La as we put on our crampons.

We set out for the giant crevasse and as we climbed, we could see Jungal and Chow leaving crampon point and coming up with the rest of our Sherpas. Beyond Camp I, a steep climb leads one up to the lip of the giant crevasse. Just before reaching the lip there was a very shattered area which we christened 'Skeleton Alley'. Hari was leading when we reached the lip of the giant crevasse. "John D", he said, "come and have a look into this."

Here the world of order and sense ends. Seracs tower askew hundreds of feet, echoing our awed conversation. The crevasse itself is about three hundred yards wide, split in turn into three big crevasses each of which had to be negotiated by going right down into them, because they were much too wide for bridging. We tried to select a route through it from our vantage point but failed to do so. All we would be able to tell the second party was that it would be a tough and a dangerous proposition. We could not return to Base Camp that day and very reluctantly had to spend another night at Camp I where Jungal and Chow had dumped some more assault equipment and food and returned to Base.

The ice on Everest is not the lifeless sheet that numbs many another mountain-side. Here it is a living, moving, ambient thing, imbued with life. It roars and rumbles like an angry panther when a jackal is eating its 'kill'. It moves its surface on huge blocks like so many dice. When to crampon carefree up its slippery surface,

when to seek the protection of the rope or one's companion's belay, when to cut steps or fix a rope, these are the questions that a climber must answer every step of the way.

That evening I got Mohan over the air, told him of our progress and also said that he should leave early enough the next day to tackle the giant crevasse and return to Camp I. The next morning, we went down to Base Camp crossing Mohan's party just above crampon point. This would be Sumi's first difficult ice job and I told him to be careful. "Don't worry", he said, "we will bash through it in a couple of days." They all seemed very confident and determined and I hoped that they would feel the same when they saw the gaping chasm.

True to Sumi's word, the second party took just two days to negotiate the giant crevasse. I was in constant touch with them from Base Camp and spoke very often to each of them. Guru's party meanwhile had started ferrying food, fuel, oxygen and equipment to Camp I.

Mohan had planned the negotiation of the giant crevasse. Two ropes led by two members were to look for one route through the crevasse, while another two ropes led by the other two members were to look for an alternate route. One Sherpa rope was to accompany each of these two ropes. All ropes were to return to the vantage point from where each would discuss his route and they would finally decide which one to adopt. Each one of the members had his turn dangling at the end of a rope in hidden crevasses, but thanks to their 'number twos' they were 'held'. After two days of thrilling route-finding, they finally found a porterable route through the giant crevasse on the evening of the second day. I had allotted a minimum of five days for the giant crevasse and it was really an achievement for them to have done it in only two.

During this period, our party rested at Base Camp.

On the return of the second party to Base Camp, Sumi had some tall stories to tell about Skeleton Alley. "If I ever became a composer", he said, "I would like to compose a Skeleton Symphony with the first movement starting at Skeleton Alley." C. P. and K. P. both had experiences of their Sherpas slipping but had managed to hold them. One Sherpa swore blind he had fallen one hundred and fifty feet which, on checking, was found to be exactly one hundred and forty-five feet *more* than he actually fell.

It was now the turn of the third party (Guru's) to prove its worth, while the second rested and we ferried through the Icefall.

Our party accompanied Guru and his men up to Camp I where we dumped loads and returned while Guru continued on to Camp II which he established and occupied

the same evening. Mulk Raj came over the air that evening to tell this and sounded so loud and clear, we suggested that he need not use the wireless set but to just stick his neck out of the tent and yell messages down to the Base. O. P., on the other hand, was so soft-spoken that one could never fathom what he was saying. Sonam's conversation consisted of ninety per cent laughter and the other ten per cent demanding 'chicken, eggs, yak and tinned food'. Guru, as always, was firm and deliberate of speech : "This is Gurdial speaking. I have nothing to say. Out." The next day they established Camp III (21,100 ft.), our Advance Base Camp in the Western Cwm. We got Mulk Raj's message just before the establishment of Camp IV saying, "Hello ! Camp three-and-seven-eighths calling Base Camp. I can see Sonam pitching a tent at Camp IV. Over."

They had also discovered a wooden crate with about twenty-five tins of Swiss cheese probably left by the 1956 expedition. The cheese was perfectly preserved and offered a pleasant deviation from our diet.

The Western Cwm has rightly been called the 'Valley of Silence'. But the silence is a refrain to the mountains ; a silence punctuated by the numerous avalanches that peel off in riotous thunder from the blue-green ice-plastered rock faces of Nuptse to the south and the south-west shoulder of Everest to the north.

The Valley of Silence keeps its mysterious secrets well. Unlike the open hazards of the Icefall, where every step is a helpless plunge into optimism, for seracs do fall and bridges do collapse over yawning chasms, the Cwm conceals its equally deep though narrower crevasses subtly under soft snow—crevasses that are the more treacherous for being so unexpected under the gentle undulations that span the route to Camp III.

With confidence in the rope and one's companions, falling into a crevasse becomes a routine affair. The rope—that tenuous yet essential link—never fails ; and though suddenly sinking into nothingness and being brought up with a jerk as the companion belays can be very jarring, having about it something like the sudden cessation of great music, a cup of hot tea from the thermos soon soothes the nerves and calms the ruffled temper.

Our doctors Sue and Ashoke accompanied ferries quite regularly. My plan was that one of them should stay at Base and the other would stay at Advance Base Camp. They would relieve each other every ten to twelve days. During the summit stage, they would both be at Advance Base ready to move up at any time in case of an emergency.

Mail from home was always welcome and the first question from camps, over the air, was, "Has the mail runner arrived ? How many letters for us ?" We were

in regular touch with Kathmandu by wireless and from there with Delhi, enabling all members to send messages home within twenty-four hours.

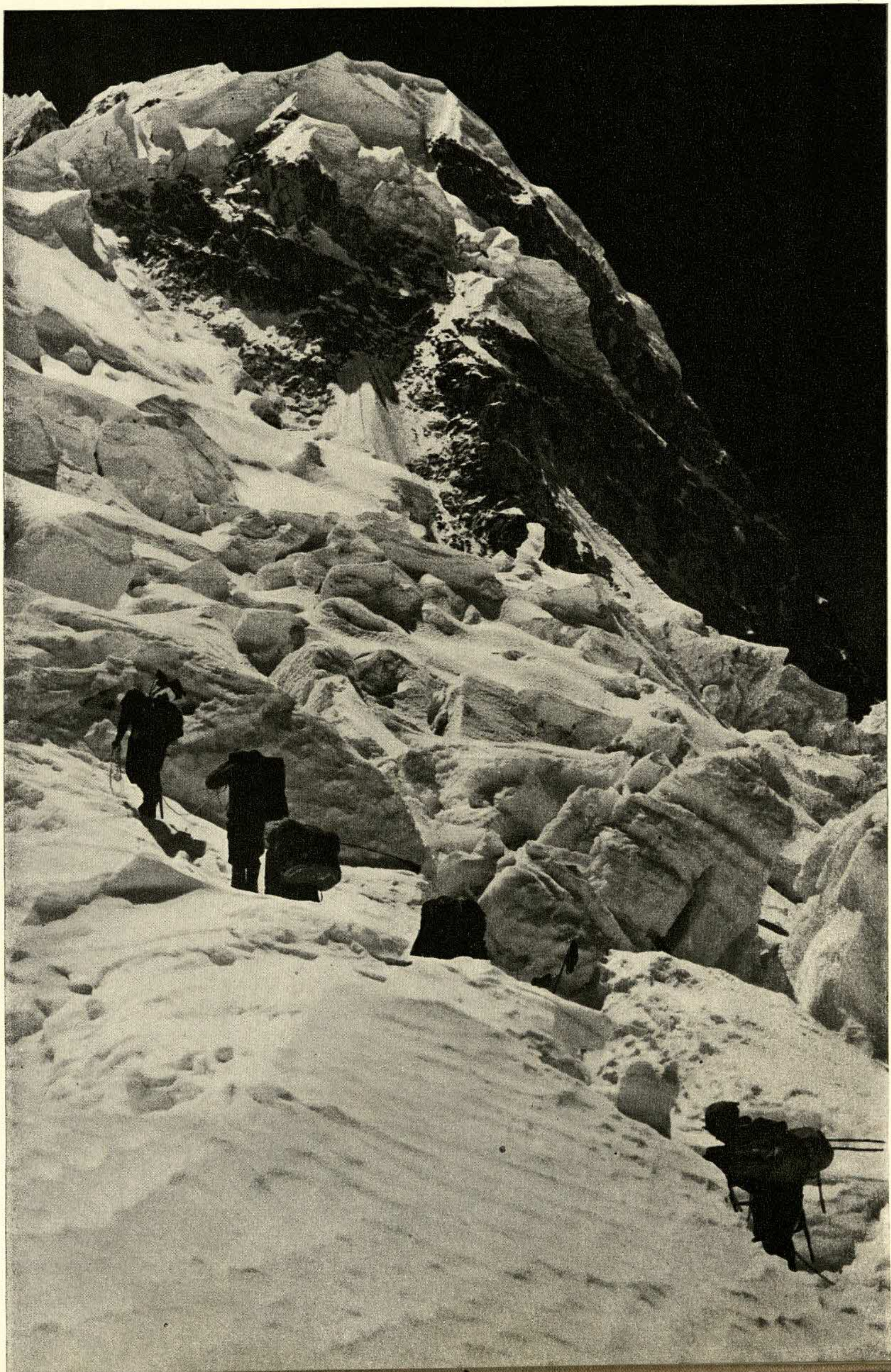
Next began the routine of ferrying loads up the Icefall to Camp II, a routine that never lost its early thrill and hazard. The Sherpas, confident in their now-proven Sahibs, sang songs on the way back after a ferry. One day, because of a broken snow-bridge on the route, we arrived at Crampon Point in darkness. A petromax was brought up from Base Camp along with the welcome flask of hot tea, the light making cubist patterns among the towering pinnacles and seracs around our Base Camp.

On one occasion, Chow was leading our ferry through the Icefall, followed by Hari's rope, then mine and Jungal's. In Skeleton Alley, a fifty-foot serac suddenly toppled. From where I stood, it appeared as if it would crush Chow's rope. Suddenly, the whole area seemed to undergo a violent convulsion. The serac instead of continuing toppling down just sank twenty feet. We all froze in our tracks. The whole incident must have taken about five seconds, but while we lived it, it seemed a lifetime. It was as if a giant monster had stretched itself and gone to sleep again just below us.

The Sherpas are now very much part of our team. They are a simple tribal folk with a fierce pride in their work and a keen zest for living. There is Ang Tharkay, our Sirdar, changed radically from his meek Darjeeling personality into an energetic organiser. He commands the respect of every Sherpa. There is Nagang Dorje, my 'number two', who climbed Dhaulagiri, stepping delicately nonchalant like a ballet queen over ladders that bridged deep chasms which echoed the ill-tempered rumbles of the glacier's depths. There is the handsome, burly Phu Dorje who will carry any load and will make eyes at any Sherpa girl—a great future Sirdar. There is Nawang Tshering, Chow's 'number two', who always produced a cup of tea with a smile and a word of cheer under the worst conditions.

Then there is the open-hearted Pemba Norbu, my Jeeves, whose sense of humour, loyalty and optimism makes up for his complete blankness in mountaineering technique. He straddles empty-headed and heavy-footed across all obstacles on all fours, inevitably wrapped and tangled in coils of climbing rope, much to the horror and consternation of his rope-mates. He manages to cross successfully each time and the elfin grin he gives afterwards excuses everything. He, along with Nagang Dorje, was allotted to me as my second Jeeves, the 'Burra Sahib' having the dubious privilege of two orderlies instead of one. All this actually boiled down to my personal kit and equipment being in twice the amount of confusion as those of the other members. Pemba Norbu added to this confusion by promptly replacing any missing article of mine from a fellow member's kit bag.

On the lower reaches of the Icefall



A ferry on the Icefall just above Camp I



Overleaf:
'*Skeleton Alley*'



Sumi, C.P. and three Sherpas returning after a ferry



Nawang Hilla, with his pigtails, looks like an overgrown convent girl. It is his first time on the mountains, but he has learnt fast and learnt well. Sonam's orderly, Da Norbu, who has been to the South Col with three other expeditions, resembles a good-hearted gorilla, and old Lakpa Sona, the same age as Sirdar Ang Tharkay, who never missed a single ferry and always encouraged the youngsters to give of their best, has gone bald climbing mountains.

Young Ang Galzyen, C. P.'s batman, was also completely raw but thanks to C.P.'s cheerful and patient guidance he, too, got into the spirit of the game.

These were some of our Sherpas. Naturally, they had joined us to earn money, but as member and Sherpa got to know and understand each other, money took a secondary place : there was team-spirit, love and understanding. Looking back at one's Sherpa rope-companions grinning up under any condition, one cannot help but feel that mountains matter to these people as much as money.

Even apart from the objective achievement of overcoming a hurdle on the way to our goal, there are many other satisfactions. How comforting to level out a broad step in the steep ice and to see the chips fly at each strong blow of the axe. To mount such a flight of steps is to feel a touch of heaven and enter a region of unconquered feelings and unexplored thoughts. There is a joy in intimacy with the harsh forms and dangers that surround one, for they represent a hidden segment of our lives. It is the mysterious metaphysics of overcoming the most difficult obstacles which fulfils the vague longings of climbers and gives them an impersonal sense of personal possession. With each confident step of cramponed feet, one moves just that much closer into companionship with the mountain-element. With each new step cut, one moulds the mountain into a memento for the days when the limbs will creak with age and rheumatism and the mind will cease its questing, finding in the warmth and security of fellow-beings sufficient excuse for living.

We had a reunion at Base Camp before tackling the Lhotse Face. The mess tent took on a gay and festive air. What we thought would take fifteen days had taken only nine. The gods had been kind. Members and Sherpas were jubilant. Thondup produced roast chicken for dinner and also baked a cake. A feeling of well-being and companionship reigned over the Camp. Gorak Singh, our goat mascot, was also admitted into the mess tent. He had obviously been drinking steadily the whole evening and burped at regular intervals, much to our delight. We had the pleasure of his company for dinner ; he ate everything but refused to have coffee, and had to be kicked out of the tent when he tried to crawl into O.P.'s sleeping bag.

We were now ready to meet the challenge of the Lhotse Face in the second round of our struggle with Everest.

THE LHOTSE FACE

Directly above Camp IV rise the steep ice-walls and bulging folds of what is known as the Lhotse glacier. The Lhotse glacier is separated from the Geneva Spur, a rock promontory which leads to the South Col, by the Lhotse couloir, both of which descend in steep ice from the rock and ice summit of Lhotse. Between the couloir and the Geneva Spur is an almost vertical band of crumbly yellow lime-stone rock known as the Yellow Band. It would be more apt to call the Lhotse glacier a glaciated mountainside, for it is just that—a sheet of ice that gets buckled and folded in its gradual slide down to the Khumbu glacier. It is a glacier's glacier rather than one in its own right.

The only route to the South Col from Camp IV lies up this maze of bulges and walls, abnormally broken up this year into wide crevasses.

It was my party's turn to tackle the Lhotse Face first.

While we did this from Advance Base Camp, the second party would stock Advance Base Camp from Camp II and the third would stock Camp II from Base Camp.

Camp IV was never a popular place with the Sherpas, as they all believed that the ghost of a Sherpa, who was killed in 1952 by falling ice, haunted the area. The camp was located just above the *bergschrund* of the Khumbu glacier, on a fan of ice coming down from the Lhotse glacier which spanned the *bergschrund* itself.

Our plan was to do two two-day shifts, two members and four Sherpas working in each shift. The remainder of our six Sherpas were to maintain us from Camp III, where Sue, in addition to his medical duties, had taken on the duties of storage and stock-piling, as well as sending supplies forward. I was in touch by wireless with both Base Camp and Advance Base Camp and hence was able to know the exact stock position on the mountain at all times.

After four days, with seven hundred feet of rope fixed, we were brought up short by a wide crevasse that spanned the width of the Lhotse glacier. After numerous frustrated attempts at circumventing it, we gave it up and decided to explore the possibilities of the glacier's edge where it merges into the Lhotse couloir. The couloir is a steep sweep of concave ice that extends all the way from the summit of Lhotse to the Khumbu glacier's *bergschrund.* We moved down to the foot of the couloir on three

ropes, Chow leading one with Nawang Tshering, a Sherpa companion of five seasons, as his second man. Ang Tharkay led a rope while Hari and I were on the third with Nagang Dorje as our middle man. Jungal had gone back that morning to Advance Base Camp because of a very sore throat.

Our rope cut steps up the couloir in the ice till about three in the afternoon. Ang Tharkay's rope then took over and I suggested to Chow that he return to Camp IV so that Nawang Tshering, who added excellent cooking under difficult conditions to his other qualities, could prepare tea for all of us when we returned; but Nawang Tshering protested indignantly that their rope had not even had the chance to cut steps or make the route. Chow moved up with his rope so that Nawang Tshering might get his opportunity. Just then, as we stood poised, the nine of us on the steep ice, there was a rending noise from above the ice bulges of the Lhotse glacier to our right. Hari looked at me and I yelled "Yeti"—a standing joke of the party which ascribed all noises to that creature. Then it was upon us—a shower of ice and rock ! We braced ourselves both mentally and with ice-axes, while our Sherpas chanted a hurried *Om mani padme hum*. Hari's hat was knocked off by a small lump of ice.

We saw Nawang Tshering lying twenty feet below Chow who held him on the rope. He had been hurled by the impact of a piece of rock, the size of a man's head, that hit him on the stomach, shattering his innards while leaving the surface unmarked.

He moaned with pain and was bleeding a lot from his mouth. We carried him by turns down to Camp IV. As we tied him on to an improvised stretcher, I assured him he would be all right. "No, Burra Sahib", he said, "There cannot be so much pain without death. Pay my respects to my mother and brother. I am sorry I will not be among those who carry to the top camp."

It was a nightmare evacuation down to Advance Base which we made after dark, Sue coming to meet us half-way with a petromax lamp and torches. At Camp III, morphine was given to alleviate the pain. Mulk Raj, in a stalwart night march from Camp II to III, had brought up oxygen for him. At 3.45 a.m., he asked for water, and Chow, beside him the whole night, raised his head to give him the last gulp of water he was destined to have. He died, thinking of his mother and his brother, in the arms of Chow, his companion of five summers.

That morning, we buried Nawang Tshering in a wood-lined grave at the site of Camp III. There were quite a few members and Sherpas who had come up from Base Camp as well as Camp II, to attend his funeral. We said a few prayers around his grave and I gave a brief talk in which I said that the mountain now meant more to us and we would have to work just a little harder for it to yield, so that Nawang Tshering's death may not be in vain.

We consoled ourselves like good determinists with Confucius, who said : "If there are no mountains, then nothing need be said ; but since they are there, these great mountains, they must be climbed." Of such sophistry is comfort made !

Death in mountaineering is an occupational hazard. In its constant proximity and threat lies the great fascination of all dangerous endeavours. Members and Sherpas knew this and responded valiantly by taking it in their stride. And yet, one cannot help wondering whether any mountain is worth a human life—and why one and not the other should be killed ? Why Nawang Tshering and not Chow, or Hari, or I, who brought Nawang Tshering here with the lure of wages ? What justification is there for such a sport ? These are the doubts and this is the sadness that tempers the mountaineer's joy.

A brave and honest Sherpa, the worthiest of a worthy band had gone. Nawang Tshering who yesterday was so vital and alive, today was no more. He looked so small and so dead.

It was now our turn to go down to Base Camp and ferry to Camp II while others tackled the Lhotse Face. At this stage, the weather seemed to take a turn for the worse. After a heavy snowfall, it was not possible to work on the Lhotse Face for one or sometimes even two days, because of danger from avalanches. The weather did not seem to improve for days on end and we finally decided to work on a clear day and accept the avalanche risk, as time was now running short. It was not possible to maintain the original parties now because of sickness. Sonam and K. P. were working on the Lhotse Face and they were caught in a soft snow avalanche. They managed to anchor themselves with their ice-axes and escaped after being taken down only a few feet. But, as the avalanche increased in volume, it caught the rope of four Sherpas just below them and dragged them down seven hundred feet. One of these four was our Assistant Sirdar, Sonam Girmi, whose shoulder was so badly hurt that he was 'written off' for the rest of the expedition. I appointed Phu Dorje I of Khumjung as the Assistant Sirdar. Of the other three Sherpas, one had a fractured ankle, one was badly bruised and the last, miraculously, had nothing wrong with him at all.

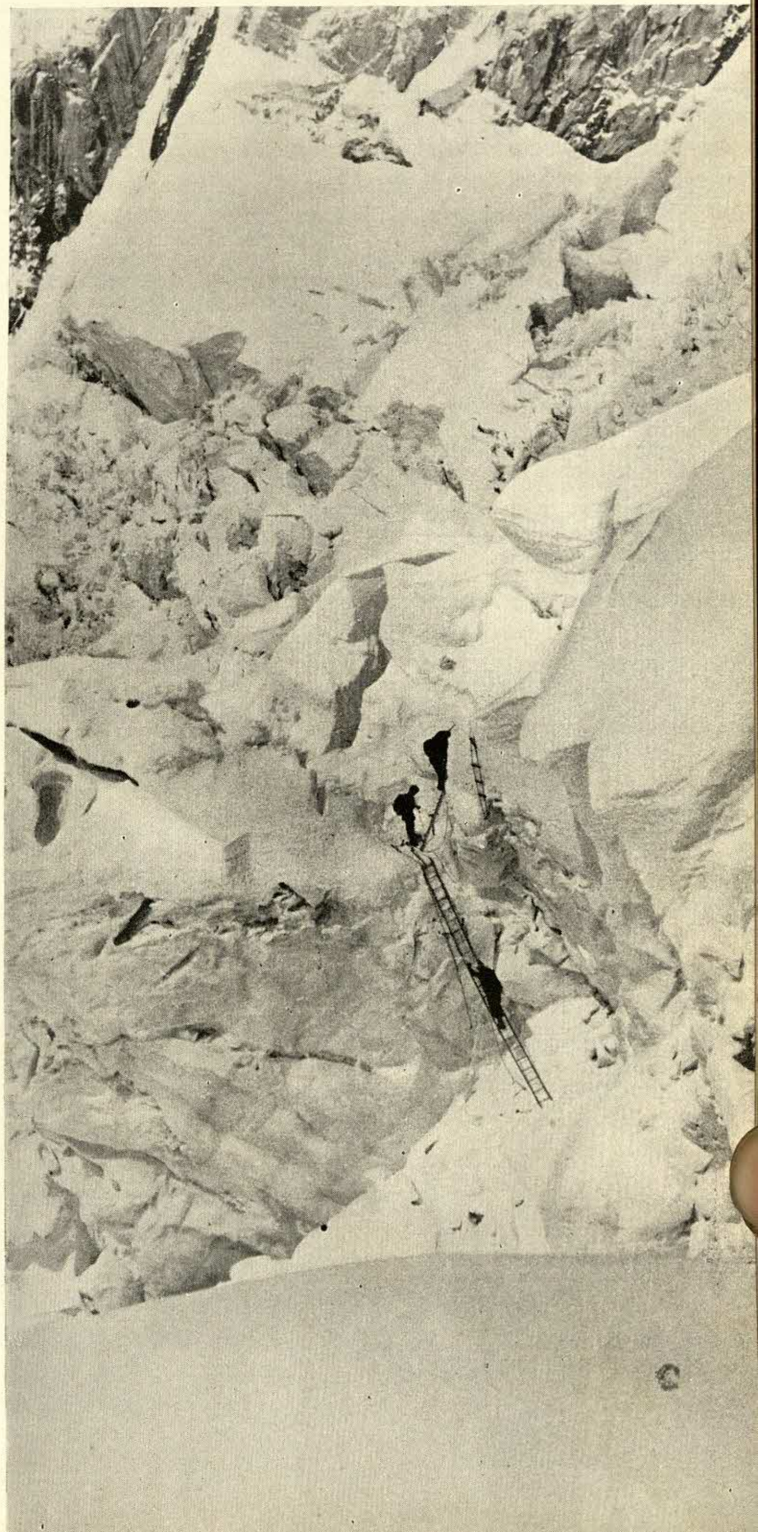
C. P. and Sumi now had their turn on the Lhotse Face and after three frustrating days of step-cutting and rope-fixing, in foul weather, they returned.

K. P. and Sonam spotted and crossed a snow-bridge across the crevasse which had stopped us. The bridge fell through some days later and the crevasse had to be negotiated—a nasty bit of route-finding reminiscent of 'Skeleton Alley'. Hari found a route through this, so we called it 'Hari's Horror'. Mohan and Guru took over next and fixed ropes almost up to the site of Camp V (24,000 ft.) in the teeth of a vicious westerly. Jungal and I spent four miserable days cooped up at Lower Camp V from



Descending into the giant crevasse

A view of a portion of the giant crevasse from just below Camp II





Opp. Page:
A ferry leaves Camp II

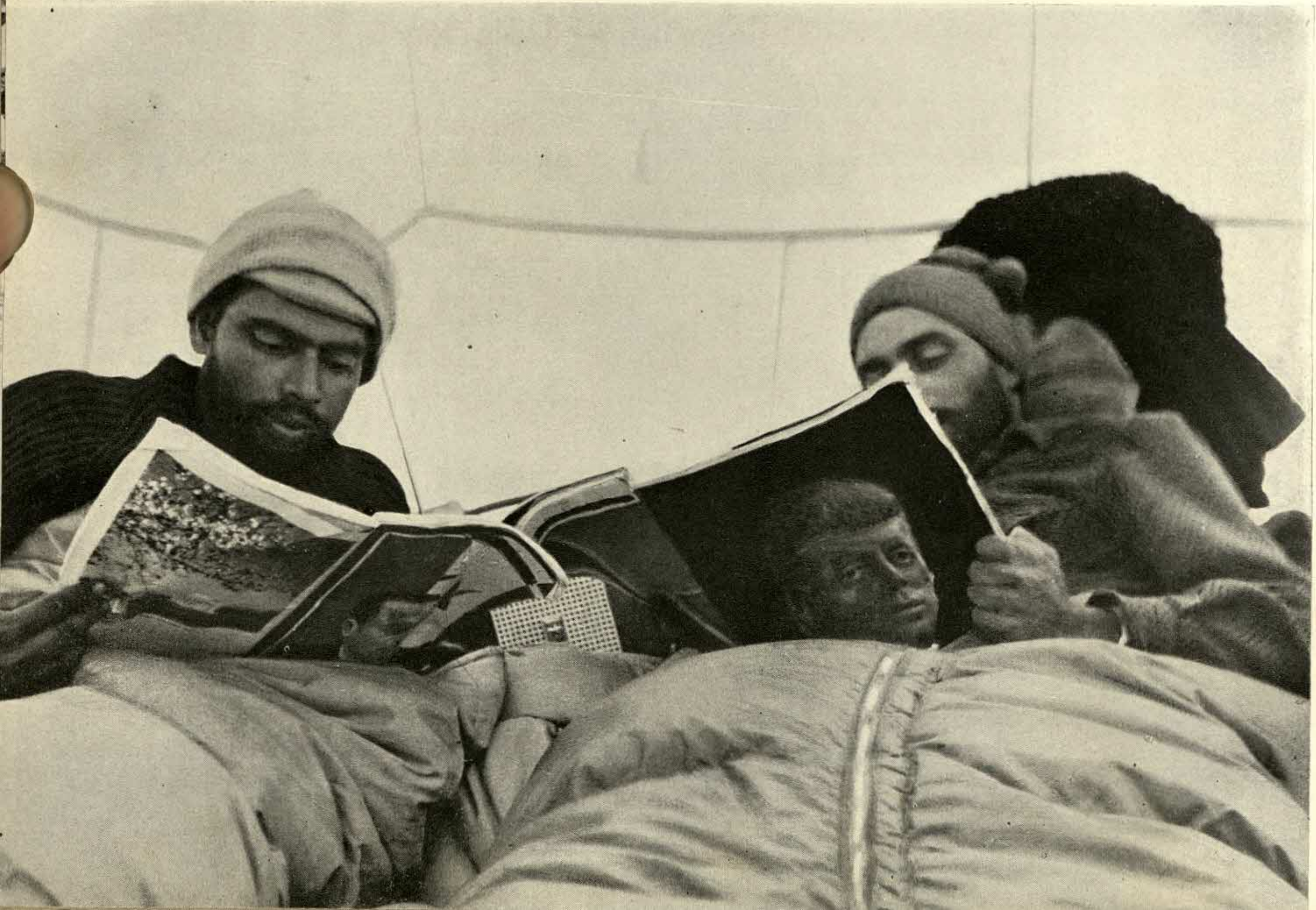
Looking up at the Western Cwm from Camp II





Sue tests an RAF Oxygen Cylinder (used by the Swiss in 1956) at Camp III

Bala and Mulk Raj in the mess tent, keeping in touch with the outside world



where we tried to work on the Lhotse couloir. We only managed to work for one day out of the four on the couloir, but temperatures were so low that Jungal got his toe frost-bitten and had to go down to Base Camp.

During our day's work on the couloir, the icy fingers of death almost touched our team again. Jungal, Ang Tharkay and I took turns at fixing rope across the couloir. Our three ropes were being followed by another rope of three Sherpas. A terrible gust of wind forced us to hunch around our dug-in ice-axes and cling to the fixed rope. Two pitons were pulled loose and the first two men of the Sherpa rope, unprepared for the sudden 'slack', had started a fast slide down the couloir. I yelled frantically to them little realising that in that howling wind no human voice could possibly be heard beyond a yard : "Turn on your stomach—dig in your ice-axes—use the pick." Luckily the third man on the rope, young Nawang Hilla still held the fixed rope. Two thousand feet below us one could see the gaping *bergschrund* between the Lhotse Face and the Cwm. We returned to Camp V that evening, a shaken but happy party and were thrilled to hear over the wireless that Pumori had been climbed.

Pumori was climbed by a Swiss-German team. They had paid our Base Camp a visit and had lunch with us, but unfortunately, I happened to have been on the mountain at the time. The members who watched their climb from Base Camp said that their progress was very fast and that they all must certainly have been guide-class climbers. The route they chose was straight up an almost vertical 1500-foot wall on to the Col between Pumori and Lingtrene. From here, they established just one camp from where they attempted the summit. From Base Camp, their four-man team used only four Sherpas. It must have been a perfectly organized and excellently run expedition. The same climbers were thinking of climbing Everest from its western shoulder in 1964.

Lower Camp V (23,500 ft.) was established by K. P. and Sonam.

Camp V (24,000 ft.) was established on the sixth of May but had to be evacuated six times because of bad weather. It was only on the 21st of May that the Lhotse couloir and the Yellow Band were completely 'roped up' after a fine effort on the part of Chow and Mulk Raj who hung on grimly at Camp V.

There were shouts of joy at Advance Base Camp as we got the message from them : "We have fixed ropes on the Yellow Band and are leading the first ferry to the South Col tomorrow." We were now poised to start preparations for our third phase —the ferries to the South Col and the summit !

It took us forty-five days to establish two camps (Camp V on the Lhotse Face and Camp VI on the South Col)—a hard and memorable forty-five days because here was the real test of our team. Everything seemed to be going wrong : the heart-breaking evacuations of Camp V, Jungal's frost-bite, Nawang Tshering's death, the avalanche,

the vicious weather day after day and sickness. Yes—here indeed was the test of our team. Time and again I saw beaten and tired men come off the Lhotse Face, but they still smiled and were ready to try again and again. As long as we kept smiling, we couldn't be beaten. Sherpa and member fought side by side, hacking step after step. Each step towards the summit was as precious as the first one.

It is just the tight situations that bring forth the best in men—Mulk Raj's daring night dash from Camp II to III with oxygen in an attempt to save Nawang Tshering's life ; Sue, the doctor leading ferries to Camp IV, himself carrying loads ; Sumi and C. P. working on the Lhotse Face and establishing Lower Camp V in appalling weather and dangerous snow conditions; Sonam and K. P. coming up again to do their bit immediately after the shock of being caught in an avalanche ; Chow and Mulk Raj hanging on grimly at Camp V in spite of sickness, snow-blindness and frost-bite almost halving their number of Sherpas ; Hari bashing a way through 'Hari's Horror' and carrying even more than our Sherpas did to set them an example ; Jungal insisting on finishing our day's work on the Lhotse couloir knowing he was frost-bitten ; O.P. ferrying day after day in the Cwm in spite of being sick ; Ashoke, whose very presence was an assurance of wit and good taste, coming up to Advance Base to help Sue in the multifarious responsibilities he was shouldering. Our kitchen boys Kipper and Dorje volunteered to carry to Camp IV and Phu Dorje always insisted on adding an extra tent or oxygen cylinder to his load. Our Sherpas were willing to carry loads after only one day's rest at Advance Base Camp. Ang Tharkay, solid, firm and friendly, was always at my side. "Don't worry, Burra Sahib, we'll do it ; I know we'll do it. I last saw weather like this on Everest in 1936 when Hugh Ruttledge was our Burra Sahib. We fought then like we are fighting now."

I had been twice before to the mountains with Ang Tharkay and respected him both as a man and as a climber. His greatest asset is his humility—a sterling quality in a man who has "kept his head" after sharing danger with the princes of Himalayan adventure like Shipton and Tilman and the great Hugh Ruttledge of the Indian Civil Service, who is, to this day, a legend among our old hill folks of Garhwal and Kumaon. His greatest adventure was accompanying Shipton and Tilman, with two other Sherpas, Passang and Kusang, in the initial breaching of the dreaded Rishi Ganga Gorge in 1934. They were the first human beings to set foot in the coveted Nanda Devi Sanctuary. He also had the distinction of being the Sirdar for Maurice Herzog's magnificent and ably led team on Annapurna I in 1950 when man first climbed an 8,000-meter peak.

To lead a team like this was a privilege. It had become a back-to-the-wall fight, the climax scarcely ten days away. But difficulties release hidden springs of energy and determination in men, bringing out the best in them. This is mountain-climbing at its finest. This is its greatest justification.

THE SOUTH COL

The tents at Camp V fluttered like silver paper under the relentless onslaught of the wind. Although the Yellow Band had been roped, our first ferry led by Chow and Mulk Raj could not leave the next day because of bad weather. Chow and Mulk Raj tried three times to leave their camp, only to be forced back into their tents by gusts of wind with snow crystals being driven into their faces. Clouds were being whipped across the Lhotse Face. Through breaks in the clouds, we watched their three attempts from Camp III with binoculars. At about 11 a.m., I got Chow's message saying they just could not move out and would try again tomorrow.

The next day they set out with a ferry for the South Col which they made by 3 p.m., but high wind speeds and sub-zero temperatures forced them to reduce the loads as it was impossible to negotiate the couloir under those conditions with a full forty-pound load. That evening, no message was received from Camp V and we spent a worried night at Camp III wondering whether the heavy hand of disaster had struck again. The next morning, Chow came on the air loud and clear to say that all was well and that they would be coming down to Camp III before dark. Two of their Sherpas were suffering from snow-blindness and two from frost-bitten fingers. One of the Sherpas on Mulk Raj's rope had broken his crampon and because of this they reached Camp V some time after 10 p.m., having to cross the Lhotse couloir in the dark. "Nothing for the paratroopers", quipped Mulk Raj.

I had selected Mohan, Guru and Sonam to be our first summit party and had sent them down to Base Camp for a week's rest before the ascent to the peak. Along with them I had sent five selected Sherpas who would carry to the summit camp. The day the Yellow Band was roped, I passed a message down to Base asking the summiters and the support Sherpas to come up. Besides the five selected Sherpas, who would carry to the top camp, there would be Sumi, Hari, Ang Tharkay and I in support.

After months of preparation our task was now moving to a climax. The third and final hurdle on Everest, the South-East ridge, up which the summit party would make its attempt, rose in inward-sloping rock slabs and snow couloirs to the southern summit (28,700 feet) from where a sharp corniced ridge led to the top in ice bulges and rock chimneys.

The mood was one of jubilation.

Amidst the jubilation, like a red thread of warning, ran the doubting refrain in our minds : What did the strangely threatening skies portend ? Why the turmoil in the heavens when the calm and reassuring stillness of the pre-monsoon lull should have descended on the Everest region ?

My original plan was to put a second ferry on to the South Col before the assault and support parties moved up. It was now, however, the 23rd of May, leaving just one week for the monsoon to hit us. I, therefore, decided to combine the movement of the summit and support parties with the second ferry.

Eighteen Sherpas and six members moved up to Camp V on the 25th of May, climbing up the redoubtable Lhotse Face in a blowing gale under an ominous sky. Ropes of climbers, coiled like Chinese dragons, made their passage through 'Hari's Horror' to reach Camp V.

Suddenly calm reigned. Looking west one could see the beautiful cone of Pumori, behind it Cho Oyu and to the right Gyachung Kang. A tiny dot in the Western Cwm showed the location of Camp III.

As the sun dropped lower, it threw long yellow shafts of light and cast blue shadows. The mountains are now blue, then grey, then purple as the sunlight shifts with the hour.

That night I shared a Meade (tent) with Sonam. Four years ago we had shared a Meade on the summit camp of Cho Oyu. He could eat, snore, sleep and laugh like a Trojan at any altitude. We recalled the happy beer sessions on the lovely lawn of the Central Vista Air Force Mess in New Delhi. "I wish we had a dozen bottles right now", said Sonam, "instead of this *tsampa*".

A relatively fine dawn found us leisurely traversing the couloir up and across the Yellow Band on to the Geneva Spur. Here crampons were removed for the rock scramble that leads one over the Spur at a height of about 26,000 feet and then down to the South Col, 25,850 feet. We used oxygen only after crossing the Yellow Band.

Investigating the cause of excessive breathlessness and the tendency on his part to lag behind, Hari realised with a shock that his oxygen was still closed and that he had carried fifty-five pounds almost to the South Col without oxygen. I suggested he try to complete the ascent without oxygen and we eventually reached the Col in a raging wind.

The first ferry had pitched a Jamet (tent) and we had to pitch two Meades and another Jamet. It took us from forty-five minutes to an hour to pitch these tents and it was with a sigh of thankfulness that we finally crawled into our sleeping bags, our fingers and toes numb, gasping for breath and the eagerly awaited mug of hot soup

Crossing a crevasse on an aluminium ladder



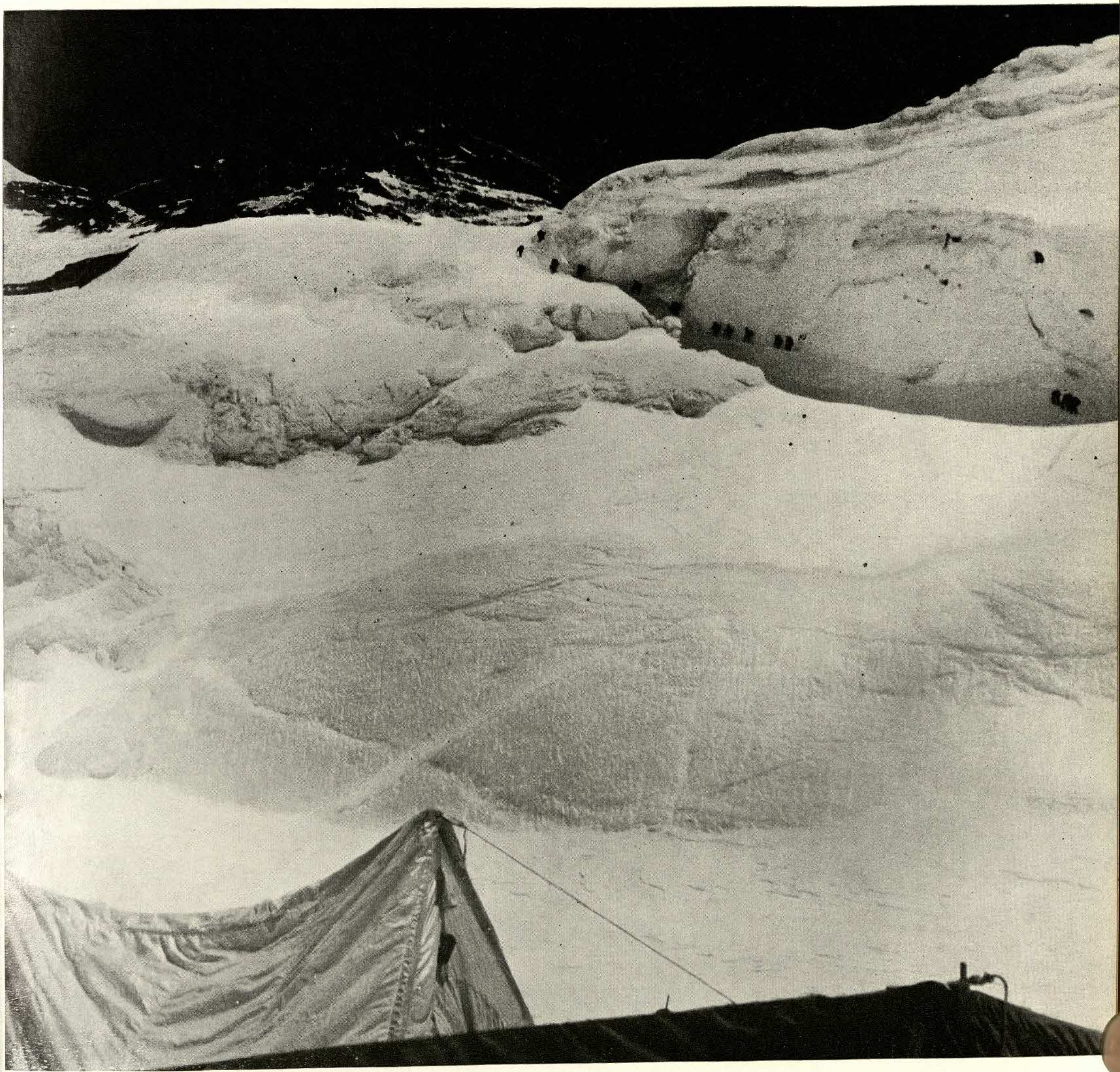


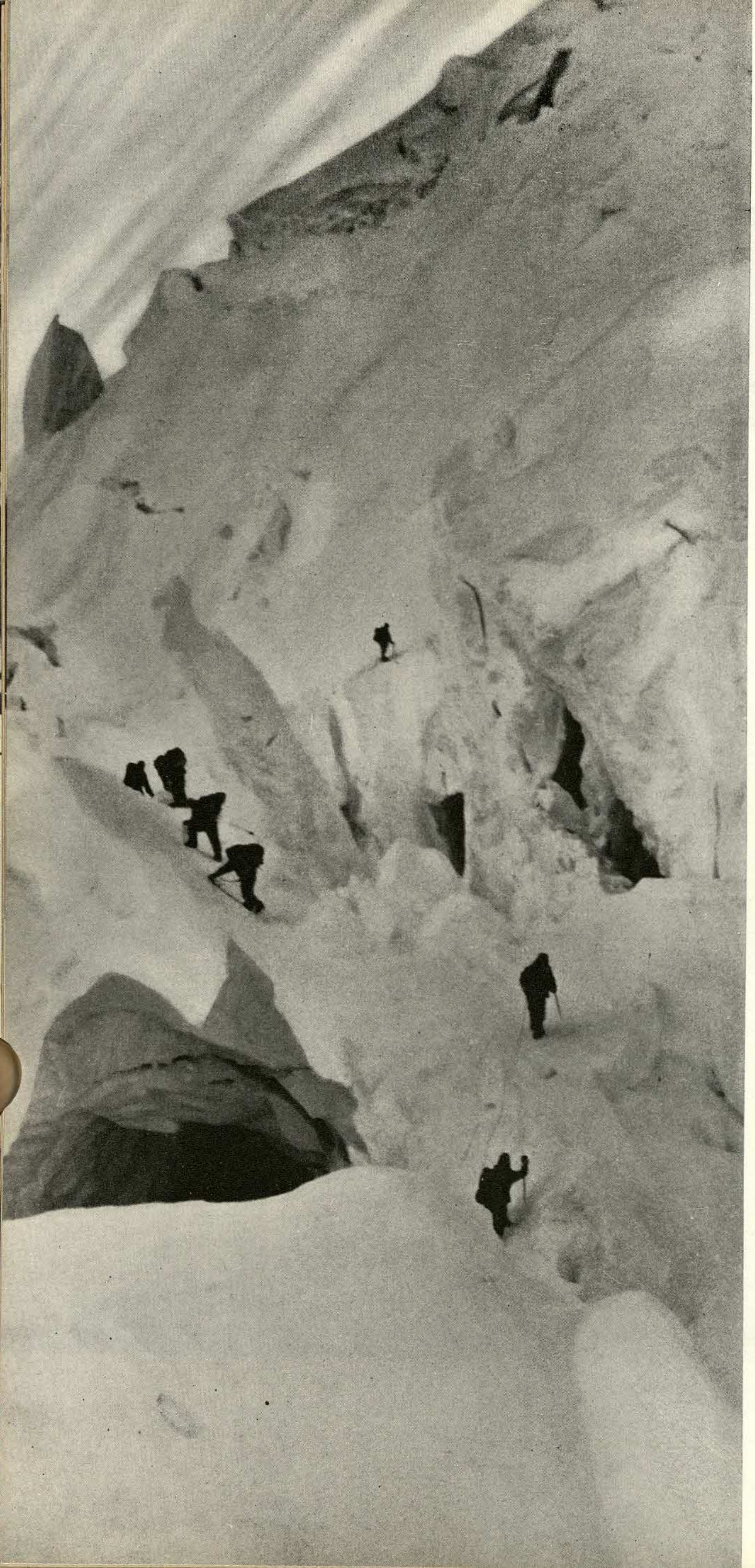
Never too cold to learn

"Come and get it"



A view from Camp IV showing some climbers negotiating the Lhotse glacier. The Geneva Spur (considerably foreshortened) can be seen in the background.

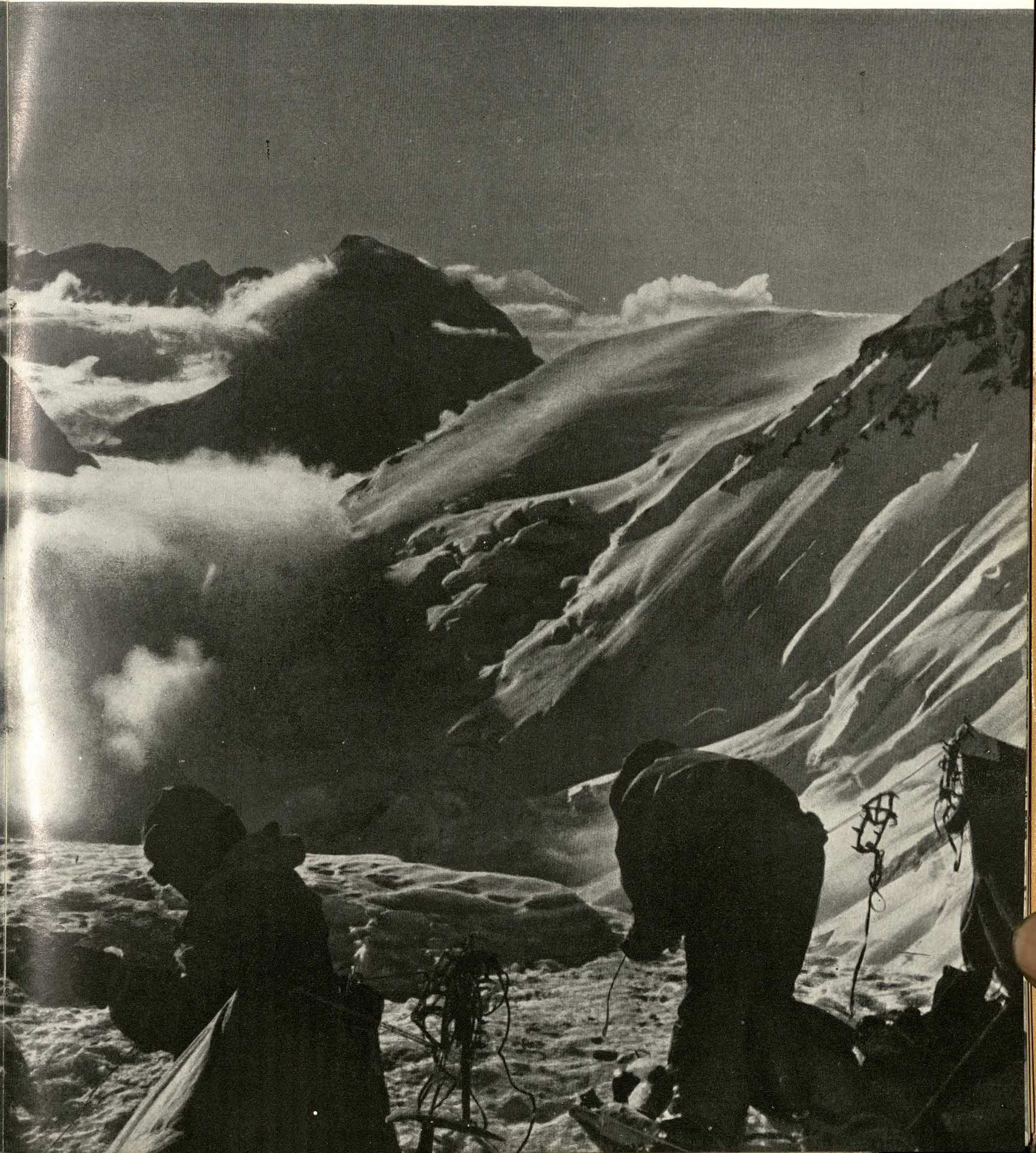




No! Not the Icefall! 'Hari's Horror' on the Lhotse Face



A view from Lower Camp V (23,500 ft.) showing Pumori with Cho Oyu behind it and Gyachung Itang on the right



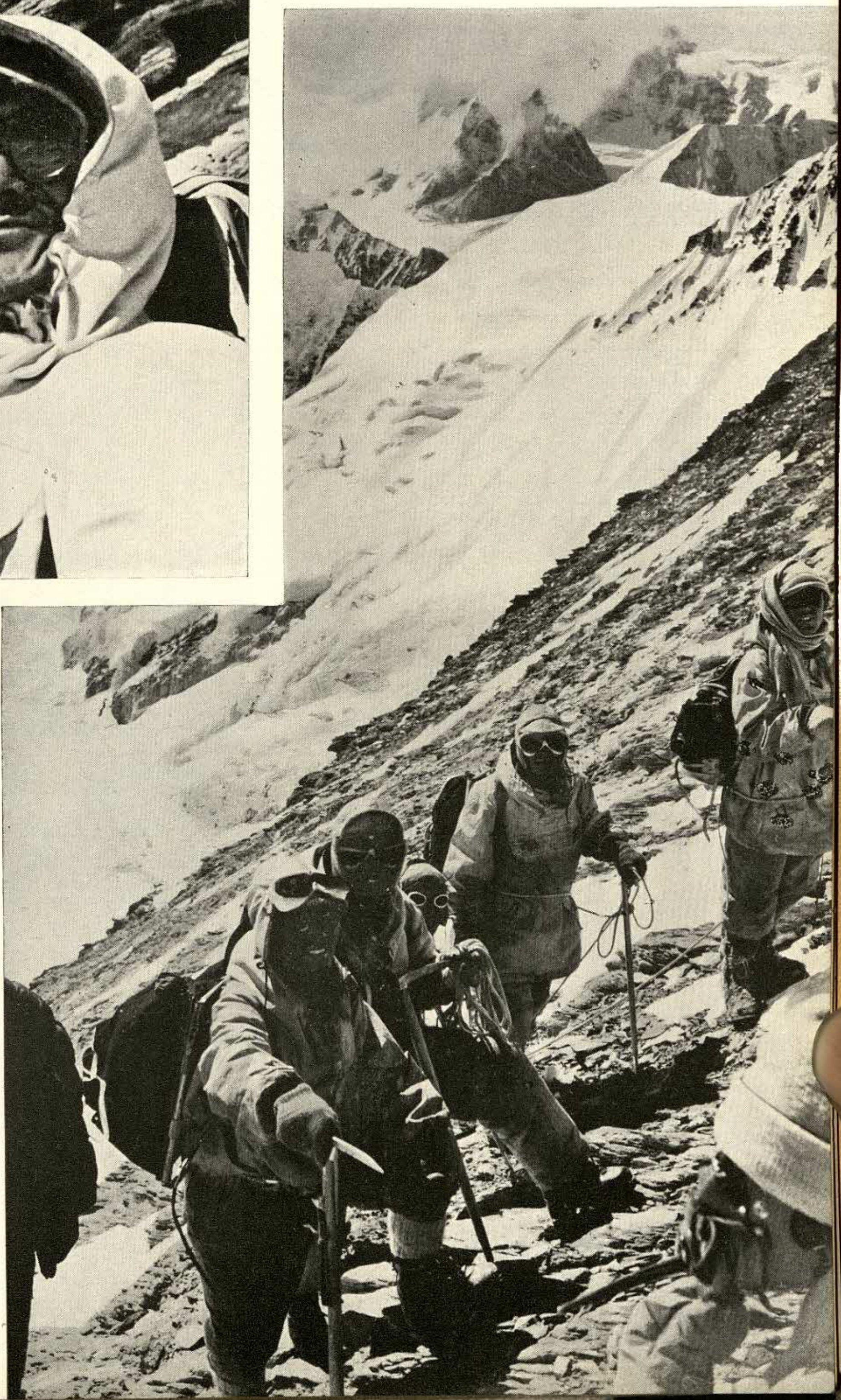
Crossing the Lhotse couloir. The Yellow Band and the Geneva Spur are in the background.





Resting above the Yellow Band

On the Geneva Spur. Looking down, the climbers can see the Cwm





Pitching a tent on the South Col, a problem

The desolate South Col



that seemed to take ages to materialise. Mohan and Sonam shared a Meade, Guru, Hari, Sumi and I a Jamet, Ang Tharkay and Mingma Tshering another Meade and Ang Tshering, Da Norbu, Phu Dorje and Nima occupied the second Jamet.

There was no dawn on May the 27th. The sun remained a vague hope behind storm clouds and wind that stole the light of the heavens. We stared helplessly at each other, the same thought in our minds. Sonam and Mohan came over and for an hour we held a conference trying to make ourselves heard above the flapping of the tents. To move out in this weather would be folly. It seemed that we would have to spend another day and night on the Col and wait for better weather to be able to pitch Camp VII, high enough to give the summit party a fair chance. This decision reached, Hari set about preparing a huge cauldron of soup on a butane burner, liberally using the cook's prerogative of tasting the broth while the rest of us looked on hungrily.

The day was spent talking of other mountains and happier days, of green pastures, high alpines, birds and animals, in drinking soups and juices, and preparing for a night without oxygen, which had to be conserved for the summit and the carry to Camp VII. I emerged from the tent towards evening to witness a scene of the uttermost desolation — a waste-land of ice and rock swept mercilessly by a cruel wind. The South Col must be one of the wildest, most barren and hateful spots on earth.

Some Sherpas were disconsolately rummaging among the litter of oxygen cylinders that lay scattered over the wide spaces of the Col from previous expeditions, in the hope of finding one with some oxygen remaining in it ; a scene more pathetic and poignant than T. S. Eliot's old woman gathering faggots from a vacant lot. Inside the tents, on the gasping, grim faces of members, redeemed only by courage and resolution, was a look of dread melancholy, a reflection of the soulless brutality of the South Col.

The dawn of May 28th brought a whisper of encouragement. The wind was still there, but it was not the wild, vicious, cruel wind of yesterday. There were only seven loads to be carried up, so two of us had to drop out. I decided that I should be one, considering myself the least fit of the party on the Col. I told Sumi that he also should not go, not because he was unfit, but because I felt that for a boy of nineteen, he had already been over-doing it. I struggled my way into the Sherpas' tent and told Ang Tharkay that Hari would lead the support party of six Sherpas. Ang Tharkay knew I had always been keen on carrying a load to Camp VII and always jested that he would carry just one pound more than I did.

"Why don't you go, Burra Sahib", he said, "I will stay behind." I explained to him my reasons, adding that I had many more seasons in the mountains whereas this

was possibly one of his last. Tears came into Ang Tharkay's eyes and patting me on the back he said he would do as I said.

Sumi and I helped the assault party as well as the support party with their oxygen masks and their roping up. Hari left first with the six Sherpas. A few minutes later, the assault rope was ready to leave. My farewell words to them were : "Remember that life and limb mean much more than a summit—even the summit of Everest ! Hang on for a night at Camp VII if tomorrow is a bad day. God bless and all the best."

Sumi and I watched them slowly climbing towards the South-East ridge, wishing that we too could have been with them. "Just imagine", said Sumi, "tomorrow Everest will be climbed." Exactly nine years ago, Hillary and Tenzing had done it for the first time.

About five hundred feet above Camp, Nima complained of a severe pain in the chest and after his load had been re-distributed, he returned to the South Col alone where Sumi and I helped him into a sleeping bag and gave him a mug of hot soup.

A little above 27,000 feet, Gurdial returned, as he was suffering from dehydration and felt he would be a drag on the summit team. Hari along with the Sherpas was at this time about three hundred feet above the summiters, moving faster, as they were required to return to the Col the same evening, after pitching a tent at Camp VII. Gurdial suggested to Mohan and Sonam that Hari should replace him.

That evening I watched the Sherpas anxiously as they came down the 'Leapfrog Gully'. They returned to the Col at about five that evening saying they had put Camp so high, the Sahibs would walk up the next day and be back on the Col by lunch. Ang Tharkay, at fifty-three, had carried a forty-pound load to Camp VII (27,650 feet). Sumi and I helped them to take off their crampons and gave each of them a mug of hot, sweet tea.

The next day, May the 29th, the weather gods frowned again. Relentless wind lashed at our tents throughout the day. Only through occasional breaks in the clouds could we get a glimpse of the South-East ridge. Our summiters could not possibly move out. I decided to send down Sumi with Ang Tharkay, Phu Dorje and Mingma Tshering to evacuate Nima and conserve food and fuel on the Col. Guru, Ang Tshering, Da Norbu and I stayed on. Sumi and the Sherpas returned from the Geneva Spur with Nima as it was impossible to take him down in that weather. I decided that Sumi's party should go down and send up a rescue party for Nima, whom we put on the precious reserve of emergency oxygen.

May the 30th dawned fine and clear. We could see three tiny figures making good progress up the ridge.

Yes, Everest would be climbed today !

I decided to try taking Nima down with Ang Tshering. In that good weather we could somehow get him through the Yellow Band and the couloir down to Camp V. His condition was now serious and I felt he had pneumonia. We struggled to get up to the top of the Geneva Spur when bad weather suddenly hit us. Strange, how a fine clear day can change in fifteen minutes ! We fought our way back to the Col dragging, pulling and carrying Nima. A glance up the South-East ridge showed our summiters gamely struggling on in the terrible gusts. They seemed quite close to the south summit, but I now had my doubts of the possibility of their tackling the summit ridge in that weather. We decided that Guru should stay on with Nima and Da Norbu on the Col. Ang Tshering and I came down to Camp III to hurry on the rescue party. Even if Nima died, we did not want to leave his body on the South Col as it would have 'spoilt' the mountain for the Americans coming next year and the German-Swiss team in 1964. Sherpas being very superstitious would quite possibly refuse to carry to the Col if they knew a dead body was lying on it. Ang Tshering and I were met by Mulk Raj and our kitchen boy Dorje at Camp IV and we made Camp III just before darkness set in. Everybody wanted to know the chances of success. I told them that their guess was as good as mine.

Our wireless sets, for some unknown reason, did not function from the South Col although they had worked beautifully right through the Icefall from Camp III to Base Camp. This meant that Delhi had not heard from us for almost five days and people were really anxious back home. We sent off a hurried message informing them that the summiters were last seen three hundred feet short of the south summit. I had worded this message wrongly, I realised, as the most grim interpretation was given to the words "last seen".

We had nothing to do now except to await the outcome of the attempt.

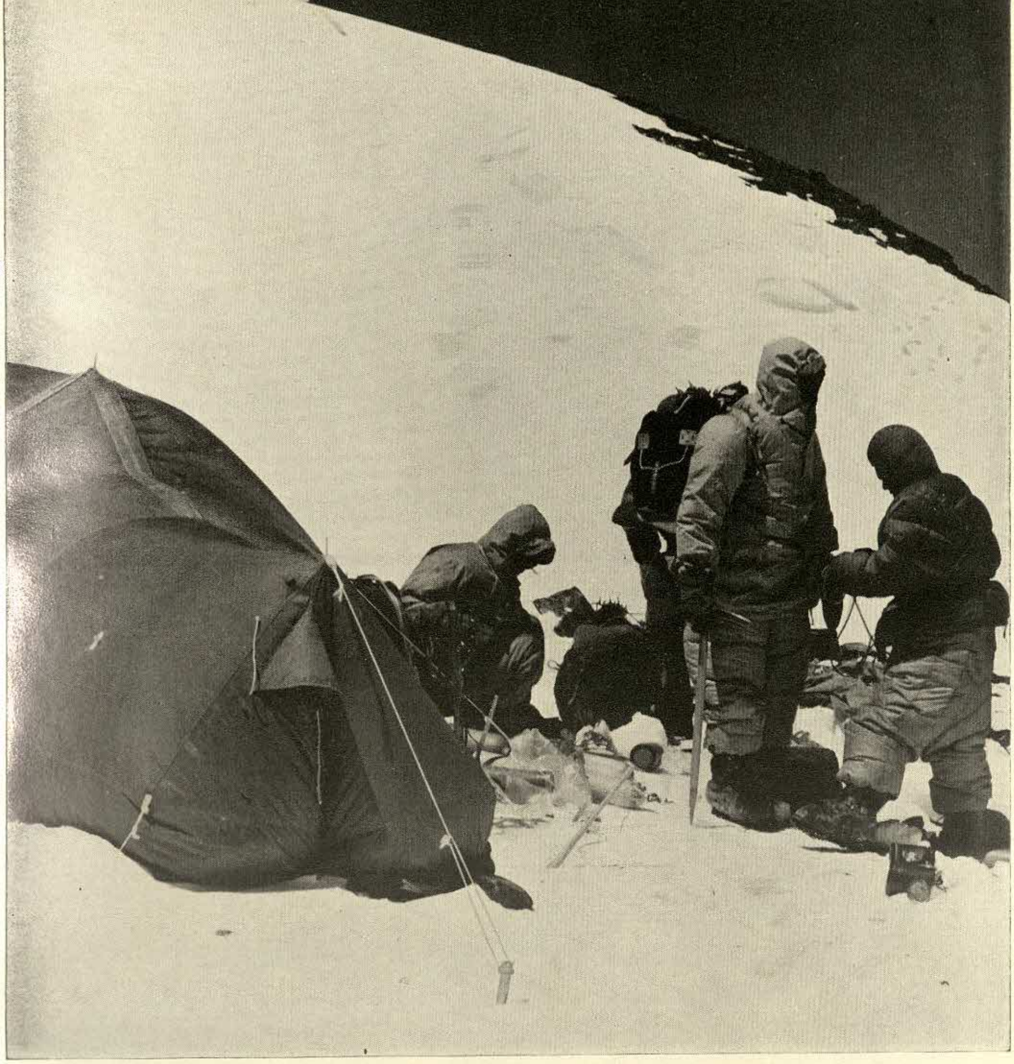
THE SUMMIT ATTEMPT

The morning of May 28th brought a surge of encouragement into our hearts, for though the sun was still hidden behind storm-clouds, the wind had renounced some of its murderous force. Despite many attempts, the walkie-talkie sets, wonderfully effective up to Camp V and the Geneva Spur, gave us nothing more than occasional variations on the theme of the wind at great expense of breath and energy. Meteorological reports are generally the subject of much justifiable mirth, but on Everest 1962, they had been accurate. In fact, it was always the same confident, warm voice and words—"thunderstorms or snow-showers", high winds and all the armoury of the mountains. More disturbing was : "The monsoon is expected to strike the Everest region around the 1st of June".

That gave us only four days ! We dragged ourselves into the chill wind to prepare to carry to Camp VII. We were to leave there the three summitters who would then have to bear the burden of carrying things to a conclusion. The Sherpas were fairly fit. Ang Tharkay and John D went about checking and sorting loads. John D decided it was best that I alone should go up with the Sherpas and bring them back — a doubtful privilege. It was only another climb, and I consoled myself that I could, perhaps, return to Camp V the same day. I had been above Base Camp now for nearly twenty days and my boots were besmeared with sweat. I had spent several days at Camp IV remaking the route up the Lhotse Face with Suman and had been ill at Camp III of a bleeding throat. After this, the lure of a world of warmth and flowing water was overpowering.

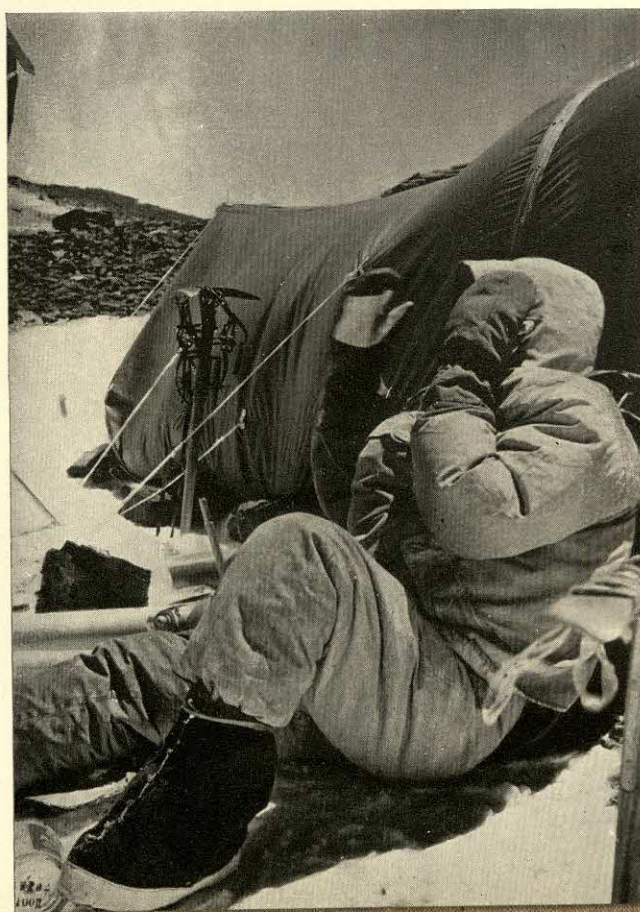
Ang Tharkay said, over my shoulder, as I fumbled with my ruck-sack, "What will you do, Hari Sahib, with all that junk ? You are returning in a few hours." So it was that he overturned my ruck-sack and I saw absent-mindedly my precious hoard of *gur*, candles, six pairs of thick socks sealed in plastic bags, three pairs of gloves similarly sealed, and some genuine trash including photographs and letters, all tumble haplessly on to the rocks. Looping a rope with Phu Dorje and Nima Thondup, hugging John D and Suman, and the three summitters, I set off towards the South-East ridge which reared cold, high and seemingly difficult above us to the north.

The little feature to the north of our camp gradually sank below us, but, oh, how painfully. I dragged shamelessly on the rope, inventing repeated excuses for



Roping up on the South Col before going to Camp VII beside a windblown Jamet tent

On the Col. making up his mind to put crampons on





Makalu

Opp. Page:

(Above) Hari and Mohan at about 28,000 feet on the South-East ridge (photographed by Sonam)

(Below) The South-East ridge of Everest showing the South Summit









Looking over the Lhotse-Nuptse wall for the South-East ridge

halts. Ang Tharkay and the other four Sherpas were way ahead. Soon it became apparent that there was one even weaker than I. Nima Thondup's breath came harder as I gradually eased into my usual pace and almost began to enjoy the climbing, the crunch of crampons on the glazed ice of the slopes and swells above the Col. Across the Col rose the chute of the gulley christened 'the Leap Frog Gulley' by the British. There, Evans and Bordillon, like others, had tumbled almost playfully in a thousand-foot glissade. Nima sat down, insisting that he would soon recover. Time was running out, for we wanted to establish the summit camp as high as possible in a gite sighted by Sonam in 1960 at a height of almost 28,000 feet. Nima would just have to return, and it was my unpleasant job to almost order him back. Phu Dorje, Danu and I shared his load, and hurried on to catch up with the others. Guru, Sonam and Kohli could be seen starting from the Camp, following us leisurely like the prize gladiators they were.

A stone-fall was seen down the true-left of the chute or couloir heralded by just a thin crack in the fine air. I conferred with Ang Tharkay and we agreed to follow a course up the true-right. As we kicked easy cramponed steps upwards, the feature sank below us. On a steep ice-pitch, Ang Tharkay and I shared the step-cutting, Ang Tharkay without oxygen as "the apparatus is too cumbersome". We scrambled on to an outcrop of slab-rock for a well-earned rest. The couloir narrowed in an inverted funnel at the crest, some four hundred feet above us, and we decided that we would now traverse the chute and climb up the rocks on the other side which seemed easy going.

Far below, following in our steps, were Sonam and Mohan and Guru ; and then there were only two, as a third detached himself and slowly retraced his steps. "Sahib, give me your extra load, for you will have to go to the summit now", said Phu Dorje to me.

It seemed Guru had turned back. Slowly, the significance of that sank into my mind. We had been told that the three fittest would try the summit, preference being given to members; and here was the call for me.

On Everest, the summit had come to signify an utterly different concept from that of the hallowed ground it had meant on Nanda Devi. It was too much a public property, important beyond its worth, and yet devoid of that almost mystic lure of the mountains of Garhwal and Kumaon.

"I don't think I will join the summit party, Phu Dorje", I said.

"Why, Sahib ? If you climb Everest you will become a great man like Tenzing or Hillary", was his astonished reply.

"That is just why I won't go", I said, appealing to Ang Tharkey's understanding. "If I am not a good or great man already, a few hundred feet will not make me so, though they may give the delusion."

Ang Tharkay solved my moral problem by sage remarks, that one climbed on great peaks as a team, and did what was best for all and that "the ship was greater than the crew". He had learned it from those other sages, Shipton and Tilman, of course.

We crossed the chute, and I unroped to relax on a relatively level platform, lazily watching Mohan and Sonam ascend. They seemed hours at it, resting often. After two hours, they sat down beside me, and we again debated the issue. Guru had given them his sleeping bag and mattress, but I still had no down-jacket or trousers, nor spare socks and gloves. Sonam offered one pair. After a long rest and discussion, we climbed on to find that the Sherpas, quite justifiably, had been cowed by a rising wind and flying snow to pitch Camp VII only a little above the site of the previous Indian expedition's camp instead of in the gite another three hundred feet up. It was an exposed and sloping shelf, but the tent seemed well-pitched. Designed to fit in three mattresses breadth-wise, without the pillow-sections, it would be fairly comfortable.

We settled ourselves, bidding farewell to the Sherpas in the worsening weather, and collecting a stock of snow for melting into liquids in a plastic bag. The burners were small but worked well, and we dipped generously into Sonam's ruck-sack for all sorts of delicacies ; there was roast chicken, delicious even at 27,300 feet, some meat and rice in a thermos, *sattu* and aerated lime juice powder. Fortified with plenty of hot liquids, and confident under our masks, we crawled into our bags and spent a night more comfortable than many lower down and even more restful than those restless tossings in the plains.

There are days when the dawn breaks clean like linen torn at a stroke. There are others when the vague icy Himalayan light suffuses ever so slowly and yet others when there is no morning but a long continuation of a northern midnight sun. Such was the change which gradually woke us to the consciousness of the world from our deep slumbers. Sonam murmured something in an unintelligible patois, and Mohan and I cursed the tent-fabric for dousing us with cold showers of crusted hoar from the moisture of our breath. Everything was cold and even the bags were moist with a strange hoar-frost. We peered out to announce the situation impossible.

"What now", a debate ensued, as futile and infructuous as the long debates at school when we pondered the relative merits of town and country in resounding phrases. "What shall we do ?" was the theme-song.

"What do you say, Hari ?", said Mohan. "Sonam, do take another careful look for any signs of a clearance", was my rejoinder.

"*Arey Bhai* (Oh, Brother), I am telling you it is bad, very bad", was Sonam's expressive understatement. "As you say, Mohan !" I add, and Mohan decides, "We can't go up like this."

Should we turn back? Should we go as far as we could in the thundering wind which had already unloosed the guy-ropes of the tent so that we now cowered in the scarce space enough for two only. Another day spent waiting here, apart from being unprecedented, was inadvisable, for who could tell the consequences of such a severe test of the human frame. It might still not yield the precious hours of peace in the heavens which we sought and prayed for. Besides, it would tax us if we stayed without oxygen and leave us incapable of effort on the morrow. If we used any of the six bottles remaining with us, we would negate our purpose by encroaching on the summit supply.

To go or not to go was the dilemma. The other alternative of sending one of us down, for which each of us volunteered, would solve the oxygen problem at the cost of great hazard to the solitary climber on his way down to the Col. To retreat completely might have been the solution had there been another summit party and enough equipment, oxygen and Sherpas at the Col to support it. There was, however, nothing at the Col, but a few choughs and ravens. The monsoon, that dreaded monster of Himalayan climbing, was a few days off, even now knocking tentatively at the great mountain ranges.

We pulled on our boots, coiled our rope, wore our crampons, and came out of the tents, less for a serious attempt to go up, than for a look around on which to base our decision. A few steps in that deathly chill wind convinced us that an attempt that day was impossible—even for Napoleon.

Our decision to stay, since we were fit and determined to draw on the last ounce of opportunity, was the only one for climbers aware of the hazards attendant upon the disdain of the rules of safe climbing. It also took cognisance of the need to make sure that they tried all they could before abandoning to objective nothingness the efforts of our colleagues down below, who had laboured long and arduously for this chance. Such as it was, they, even now, must have been watching that bare citadel with hope in their eyes.

We had one spare cylinder of oxygen. While Sonam took occasional sniffs from his remnant and his Faith, Mohan and I shared this between ourselves at a quarter of a litre per minute.

That day remains the longest of my life ; longer than any one year. Every detail of every moment, as we panted and moaned our breathless way through the hours, is faithfully and painfully etched in memory. That day—a semblance of grey darkness with drifts of snow piling higher around us each moment—was just intolerable. The summit route and the ridge above us remained a blind conjecture behind a pall of cirrostratus which absorbed the light of the sun. We managed to keep the burners going. Spilling one mess-tin-ful of liquid for every one that made its lukewarm way down our gullets, we found ourselves in a strange world where mind alone functioned or showed signs of life. The fabric of the tent pressed its frosted surface on my face. Mohan, to my numb mind, seemed to be taking all the oxygen. I constantly checked to ensure that the sleeping bag was still there, for it might not have been there from the little warmth I received from it.

It was a counting of seconds, till it was my turn for the oxygen, every fifteen minutes. At last, it was in my hands, on my nose, the cold mask, still wet from Mohan's breathing. Some comfort, then dazed thoughts of God and Horror, a few helpful breaths, and Mohan's voice, "Hari, what about the oxygen. It is twenty minutes." Impossible ! The man thinks I am a fool ; I have just taken it from him. "How people become selfish". Such uncharitable thoughts on one level of the mind, while a still voice knew the truth and made me say, "Just giving, Mohan, a few more breaths." All this repeated, oh, how many times ! There were twenty-four hours, which makes it nearly a hundred times : Mohan must be a very tolerant person !

Prayers from Sonam's corner, when he is not snoring, for it is difficult to discern the difference. Mohan seems content even without oxygen. "Oh ! God, why did I come into this world of torments; am I dead, and is this the torture chamber of Dante's Inferno ? But it is cold, so it must be Purgatory, and I must climb, get out for fresh air, reach the summit which leads back to health and sanity and forgiveness." The verge of madness is not far from those who add Anoxia to the blank solitude of high mountains, and I do believe that night it was the nearest I have been to mental derangement.

"Shut up, Hari, and let us get some sleep", from Mohan, as I moaned aloud. But he had the oxygen on that occasion. Sonam slept through it all, and woke us with a triumphant yell of delight, "See, brothers, see ! What did I tell you ! Twenty-one Lamas have prayed for this".

Outside the tent, as we forgot even oxygen in our excitement, was a world of pure joy, an endless understanding of sky, as violet as it can be only in the High Himalayas that we loved, spreading its mantle of gentleness and cheer over a landscape of purple

hues and the bronze of friendly cumulus clouds which reposed somnolent in the valleys. The wind was now a forgotten horror.

It was 5 a.m. and light was gradually crystallising out of the steely solvent of the air in the tent. We set to at once, dressing, preparing liquids, thanking fortune for this well-deserved yet unexpected outcome, as we thought it to be, for what could stop us now ?

By seven, we were struggling slowly in the wake of Sonam ; Mohan and I in the throes of the usual weakness and irresolution which besets the beginning of any difficult task. But soon each step became a milestone, a landmark. We saw it almost impersonally. Not very much later, each step was to become a different sort of landmark, but we were innocent of the terrible hours ahead.

Sonam headed for the gite, and we followed, since he had been over this terrain once. It took us an hour to reach the gite, a ten-foot-wide, twenty-foot-high aiguille standing some ten feet apart from the rock-face of the mountain just near a couloir that led up in the direction of the crest-line of the South-East ridge. The space between the needle and the face is an ideal platform of snow, protected from the wind for the summit camp, and we berated ourselves for not pushing our own camp up to here.

Sonam still led, while Mohan was end-man, and we made rapid progress with ice-axe belays up the steep couloir of hard snow, which joined another, larger couloir leading to the crest. Taking a line along the true-left of the large couloir, sometimes on snow, often on the rock slates, we were soon scarcely a hundred feet below the crest of the South-East ridge at the shoulder, where it eases off a little. It must be nearly 28,100 feet at the shoulder. We halted for a longer breath on some level rocks, braced against the mountains for safety, and downed the first of a series of small tins of mango juice which we had brought, and which we ate like ice-cream.

It was good to be alive and strong on May 30 at 28,000 feet, to drink in the glory of that Himalayan morning, when every element fused itself into a harmony of Grace and Beneficence. There was no memory in the world that day, no past and no future, only an endless present that seeped through our souls and merged into an engraving of the land around us. It was the veritable manifestation of something that no longer fought us, nor tortured us, nor tested us, nor even was outside us. It was rather a feeling that entered into us, accepted us as we were, and showed what must, even under less inspired circumstances, as from an aircraft, be one of the grandest and most inspiring scenes on Earth. It all seems too big, too grand, too much like a travel brochure as viewed and recollected in our daily routines. Gaunt Makalu, so sure and positive, shadowy Cho Oyu and its satellites, distant Kanchenjunga, the southern ranges, and those well-behaved mountains of India to the west, were not overpowering

as they seem in description. They were there, a self-explaining entity that explained everything in the Universe. It was a new Universe compounded of, and containing, only that which was significant and beautiful, a Universe which taught us again to live and to love, being alive and in love with it. This is the reason why mountains are climbed.

The ranges of Central Asia, piled in serried rows, rose in the imagination, all under the same blessed sky, and under us, Everest, a mountain that is the apotheosis of all mountains. The crest of the ridge above ran at a slight incline, merging into the snowy slopes of the southern and south-eastern aspects of the South summit massif. Like some forgotten remark after the farewells have been said, the summit ridge itself, an unimpressive line of bumps and wells of ice, fractured a third of the way up by the landmark of the rock-chimney. Oh ! we were almost there !

Sonam grinned through cracked lips, and, as usual, suggested another can of juice. Mohan, ever austere, ever thoughtful, smiled broadly, and I, ever effervescent, made a good attempt at the Choral Symphony. It was inspiring, it was easy, it was within a stone's throw. We would soon go back to Base, lie on the swards of Sherpa-land and drink straight out of running-brooks like animals, so starved were we for life and movement. "Only another three hours", someone said. "Oh, no, we will do it in less", replied another.

As we plodded towards the crest, small avalanches began to peel off below our line of progress. We cautiously belayed our way up, avoiding the crest, climbing up some rocks instead, and eventually reaching the crest. From there it took us another half-hour of cautious step-kicking in gradually deepening snow to reach the base of the slopes which lead in a steep sweep to the South summit.

More mango juice, as we dumped our half-used bottles here, fitted fresh ones, and set off again. Jubilation soon lost itself in a swirl of snow around our knees ; the unguarded optimism of a half-hour ago was gradually lost in thickening whirls of snow and ice as the wind rose in a funnel of great intensity, stinging our faces and fogging our glasses as often as we laboriously cleaned them. The snow became softer with each step upwards, and we hugged the outcrops of rock that are the junction of the south-western and south-eastern faces of the massif. We sank to our knees all the time, and to our waists frequently, the wind doing its best to bury the ends of our life in beautiful crystals, which seemed so horribly callous at that time—a personal affront to our existence.

But the crystals still rocketed and whirled around us, and the wind guffawed coarsely at our helplessness. Where was our Universe of peace and love and acceptance ; where was its tranquillity and where its unity ? It is to answer such questions

that one climbs and climbs again. On that wretched ridge, in the grasp of that frenzied, tempestuous squall which left all but Everest free from its brutal dominion, all we thought of was the next step, the rope ahead, the tug behind, the danger of a slip, the firm belay, and the fogged glasses.

"It is two o'clock", shouted Mohan from behind. I took off my waterproof mittens, then my down-mittens, cleaned my glasses on the brow with the silk gloves, wore them all again, took one step, shouted "let us reach the top of these rocks, then we will parley". I found my glasses fogged again, half-full of snow that entered through every minute crevice, through the air-vents for preventing fogging. Sonam tugged, going steady and strong. Plodding through deep snow, bending to avoid the wind, we reached the highest rocks on the South summit massif, some one hundred feet below it. As Mohan came up, I took in his rope and compared the South summit to the roof of a Calcutta building; it was much less, a bare fifteen minutes in normal conditions. And then, the main summit, apparently almost a level traverse over ice formations, a broken cornice—interesting, though not difficult. It hardly seemed worth the trouble climbing the main summit because the South summit was so much more imposing and so near; it would have taken us hours and hours to climb the summit-ridge in that weather. This may have had something to do with the disdain for the peak.

It was two-thirty when we braced our backs against the storm and held a shouted debate over that forlorn ridge. It had taken us two hours to cover the first seven hundred feet, but over five hours for the last two hundred feet, whereas Tenzing and Hillary had taken two-and-a-half hours from their Camp VII (circa 28,000 feet) to the South summit, and a similar period for reaching the main summit from there. The Swiss had made even better timings, and had better weather.

We would take at least an hour to reach the South summit, and would be benighted on the return. To try the main summit would be to court a one-way climb to disaster; that was neither good mountaineering, nor our wish. We had to turn back, and relished the few moments of the feel of elevation as well as the still-rising wind permitted. Melancholy tinctured our aspect, and the return began in great dejection.

It would have been memorable for its gloom, had not the retreat also become fraught with grave hazard. We had to descend carefully along the edge of the rocks and the snow. The former was unstable and formed a danger to the person below, whilst the snow-slopes of the mountainside seemed liable to catastrophic avalanche, being soft snow covering sheet-ice. Our laboured descent went on in a long dirge till we reached our 'dump' of oxygen and changed our cylinders, throwing away the now exhausted summit-cylinders.

Time passed rapidly, and an unnatural darkness had descended on us even before we left the South-East ridge for the couloir below. Sonam suggested a short-cut which got us into some trouble over ice glazing some rocks and we wasted more time in going down the large couloir. The security of the morning had given place to a dreadful foreboding. Rock-slabs and slippery, hard ice made a nightmare world of danger and death and negation.

We belayed each other securely, twice averting catastrophe. Once it was when Mohan held both Sonam and me, and again when the three of us went a few dozen feet in a glissade down some snow which thinly covered the ice. Near the spot where we had spent some memorable moments on the way up, we sank down in sheer exhaustion. Our oxygen, calculated accurately to last just long enough in fair weather, gave out. We felt greatly the sudden desertion of this ally which opens the door to pleasant climbing worlds hitherto reserved for the eagles and the choughs.

Our lips parched and cracked almost perceptibly, blood oozed its raw, sour taste and mingled with a dry phlegm that should have been saliva. Throats became like parchment and the mind felt a dull pain seep through its cells. But we still had hope, although we had lost the well-deserved summit for no fault of our own. We had lost a battle with more credit to the vanquished, and we would come back again. We would now return in the chill of the night to our tents and after drinking some warm liquids, sleep somehow till tomorrow brought us renewed vigour and the world again looked good, as it undoubtedly was.

The mountains teach us to hope and to strive towards our hopes, however difficult the route. They also teach us not to hope, to surrender our wills, for how else can one explain the vanity of our hopes ?

We descended in increasing gloom and exhaustion till somewhere in the vicinity of the small couloir which leads to the gite, once again we sank exhausted in soft snow. We uttered half-syllables desultorily—empty, thin blades of sound signifying nothing but the despondency of helplessness and the limit of exhaustion. "Let us have a short nap", suggested some one, and, shouting inwardly, desperately, soundlessly, that to sleep now was to sleep forever, one gradually obeyed, reclining deeper on a feather-bed of nostalgic ecstacy, of a happiness that had never been. In short, it was euphoria, that dread affliction of the mind which claims the victims of cold as of anoxia.

The snow was no longer cold as I rested my back against it, tilting my eyes towards where the stars should have been and where a swirling cauldron went round and round. It seemed better to close the eyes like this, ah! yes, and to enter that gate, and hear the music of the wood-winds, the orchestra-celestial of a strange yet intimate

festival. There is instead an opiate for all ills, a divine forgetfulness that is not a benediction, but a force that pulls you, sucks you inwards like a vacuum, into the vortex of its conclusive end.

If the mind is dazed by cold, the senses dulled by exhaustion and euphoria, how the sudden start that awakens, why the saving grace of remembrance ? It came suddenly. Shouting to each other of the dangers ahead and the danger just left behind, of an endless slumber, we again moved on in a frantic effort, down the couloir and down to the gite. How friendly it looked ! We went on to the loose, shaly slab-rock below and across the wide side of the ridge above the Col.

Darkness was now reinforced by a new threat as lightning and thunder glinted and echoed all around us in a sinister overture to the monsoon. Gone was euphoria, that blessed opiate. We realised through dimmed senses that all was not for the best in the best of all possible worlds, that we must find our tent soon ; we had been going an hour, two, and yet no tent !

"What time ?" my voice sliced the air. I repeated my question, but where were Mohan and Sonam. I shouted for them. "They must be at the South Col by now, you fool", I thought, till Mohan bumped into me. It was 9-30 p.m. ! Surely, we must be there now, one felt, but the welcome shape of the tent eluded us.

"Seen it", shouted someone, and we rushed, stumbling, tugging, often crawling on hands and knees for surer footing. A vague form said, "Sorry, it's a boulder." More false hopes, and the cold and desperation of death steadily crept up irrevocably over our dull minds. Oh ! if we could smell it like canines, but the thin air and the egotism of wind and cold do not tolerate even the smell of life, and we wept with our hearts, even while keeping our eyes open for any welcome sign. "Must get to the tent"; "Camp, the only hope"; "Water" ; "Must drink something"; such were our only thoughts. There is no place for friends and relatives in the mind when it answers squarely the challenge of death, for there is a concentration of faculties which, in ordinary life, would work wonders. So it was, as the terrible cold froze our hands through two pairs of mittens, and the feet lost feeling. We did not worry about frostbite, but about the chill of ice and snow which rose from our feet to cramp our minds in a fog of dazed resignation. We looked around us, peering into the darkness as if to rend it with our concentration, till our eyes seemed to freeze and remain open. Crawling and stumbling and crawling again mechanically we fought for survival as long as possible. Hope, that delusion, sprang again and again in new forms—a shadow, or just another rock.

All seemed lost and we decided to take our last chance of survival by making for the South Col where there would be other humans, their warmth and hot drinks.

Such was our dazed and desperate state that if we had actually made for the Col, we would have fallen a victim to cold and exhaustion, in that six-hour descent, had not an accident claimed us earlier.

So many false alarms had we had that it seemed cruel to say, "Sonam, I have seen the tent". So, one said instead, "Sonam, there is a rock forty feet ahead which cruelly resembles our tent. Let us go and curse it." And, of course, it was the tent at last.

We melted precious fluid, doing what we could to restore circulation to our feet and hands. Our limbs had been quite warm and healthy throughout the last two days and nights, but from the afternoon onwards, my feet had gradually been losing sensation, though they still functioned well on reaching the tent. The last hour had made it much worse, and a mild inkling of impending trouble now matured into a conviction that I was frostbitten. The effort of gathering snow for melting and rubbing our extremities, after removing the moist and ice-encrusted socks, was almost too much, coming after our recent efforts and the lack of oxygen. Even then, we knew that this drill had to be gone through before one could earn that sleep for which the body and the soul craved. We fell asleep almost as we were, variously engaged, sleeping the sleep of prostration, scarcely feeling the lack of oxygen.

The sun shone bright and almost warm on the tent at 10 a.m. as we mechanically wore our boots to begin the painful descent to the South Col.

Danu met us below the gulley ; as we approached him with frequent halts, bracing ourselves against the wind which had again picked up force, we could see he was carrying something. "Tea", said Sonam, and we tried to go faster. It was impossible, but we finally fell into his arms one by one, drinking out of thermos bottles, eating fruit out of cans, all cold and freezing but delicious and like the manna—life-giving. Danu wept into our fruit and our tea, having given us up for lost, having given up his beloved Sahib, Sonam, for lost.

But we were back, and Guru made us comfortable, mothering us, giving me his sleeping bag as Mohan and I had left ours at Camp VII. He rubbed my toes for an hour. While Danu fed us soup and *sattu*, Guru turned to face us and asked, "What time did you reach the top?" It took a few minutes to realise what he meant. It was a sad necessity, but we recounted our story. Everyone, including John D, who saw us a little below the South summit at near about 9 a.m. on May 30, had concluded that we had reached the summit and then been lost on the descent.

We left the South Col to the choughs and the ravens and to the everlasting sculpting of the wind on June 1. Scarcely a hundred yards from the Col, we found

ourselves enveloped in a thick filmy cloud of ice that instantaneously coated our suits and our ice-axe stems with a layer of white, fuming ice ; the wind tore at us, bodily lifting the lighter members some few feet. We crouched to the ground and shouted counsel, for it would be easy to lose the right route in such fog. This was the Mountain's parting sting, but we eventually found our way down to Camp III and reunion with others.

Success and failure in the mountains are personal concepts, nebulous at best, and unknown always.

But the summit is never the sole determinant of success. Our success was all along the way—in our victory over our fears and our pettiness, the fusion of fourteen widely differing men into the realisation of an Ideal. This was the most valuable gain, apart from setting up many climbing records and showing unprecedented endurance. They deserved it !

"Why climb", runs the doubting refrain in the mind. Mallory's oft-quoted "Because they are there", is no more adequate than the crass "summit", or the anthropologists' view that it is in answer to an instinct bred in cliff-dwelling man to survey the country from high vantage-points for danger and quarry.

Why climb ? Why, indeed ? It is of the essence of the sport that we do not know. We would turn to less wholesome pursuits, the day we knew. Meanwhile, we climb in answer to an irrepressible impulse that leaves no repose once we have set foot on our first mountain. It becomes an integral part of our personality. Often, the relationship between some mountains and some men reaches peaks of emotional and idealistic artistry. Each mountain we climb dons the garment of the metaphysical aspect of our personality—intense, mysterious and often beautiful.

And the justification is no easier. What had we gained, what had we to show for the money and effort ? Had we not squandered precious resources on a dilettante sport ? Was not mountaineering a profitless art ? Fair questions, all. Yet, Man does not live by bread alone and that part of him which needs mountains is the most precious and valuable. Profitless ? Yes, indeed, that is our banner and our real justification. Mountaineering is the most comprehensively useless human activity. Its greatest charm is that we stand to lose all and gain nothing through it. Material benefit would ruin its pure character. A disintegrated aim can be a more real reward than a dozen plans and projects since the latter's success depends on the former. Our proudest success was that we risked all for a self-imposed task. That is the teaching of the *Gita*, as of all religions.

The grandeur that is the world of ice and rock and snow can never fill the place of homely things in the hearts of men. A pure, ethereal spirit could bear its endless

solitude. We came back changed men. Hostile starkness taught us an appreciation of beauty, the chill of ice has made us love all the more the warmth of camp fires. Solitude, howsoever desirable, has grown in us an affection for company. If we took faith to Everest, despite all disappointments, we have brought it back reinvigorated. Of our scepticism, we have had it purged of shallow cynicism.

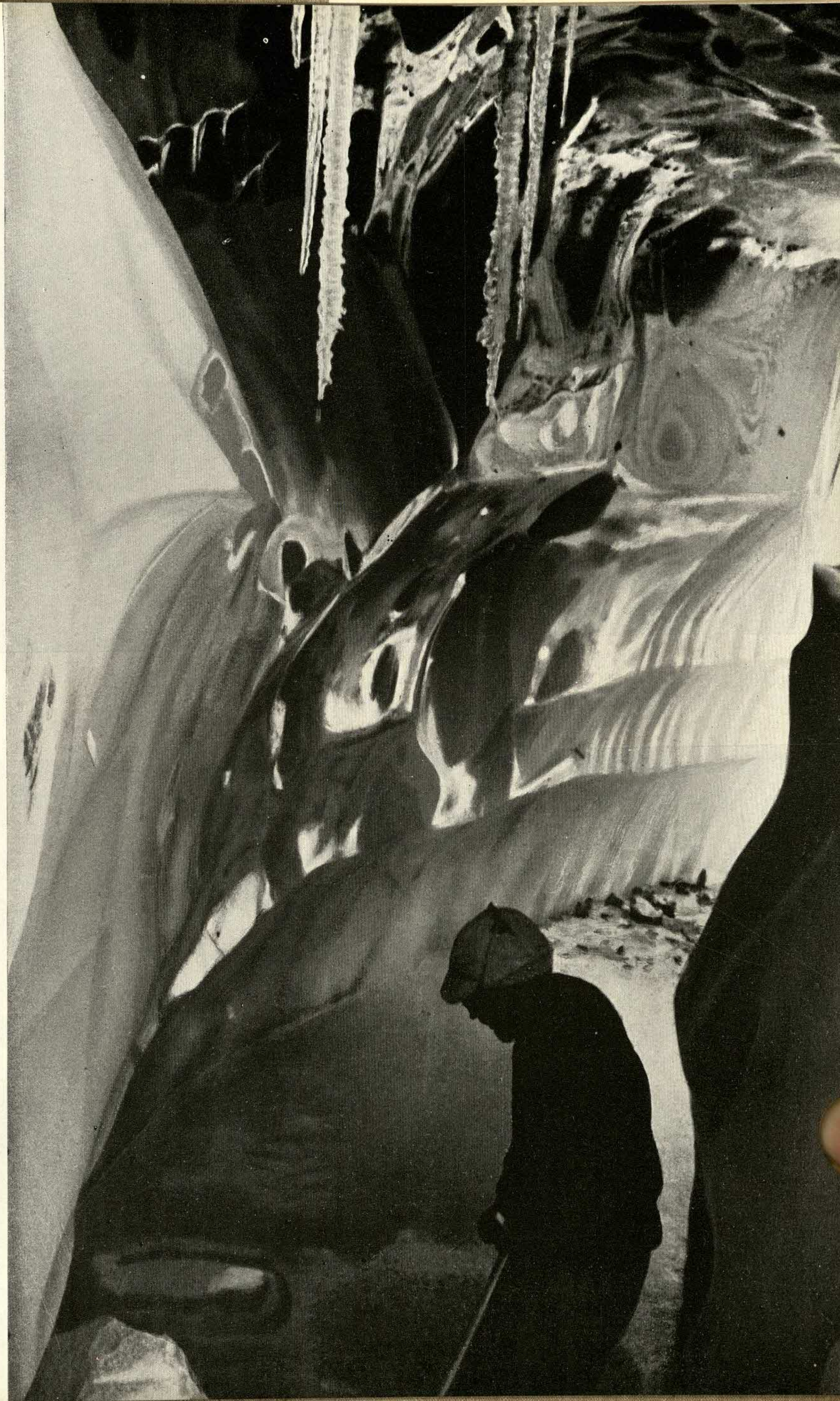
Our hardened arteries alive once more, our perceptions sensitive to the needs of the world below, we have come back, like Adam of legend, "The world compounded body of a Man, whose flesh is soil, whose bones are rock, whose blood is water, whose hair is grass, whose eyesight sunlight, whose breath is wind and whose thoughts are clouds." As men and as mountaineers, we could not ask for more.

The giant crevasse in an angry mood on the way back. The rope and aluminium ladders used on the way up can be seen between the two seracs to the left of the climbers.

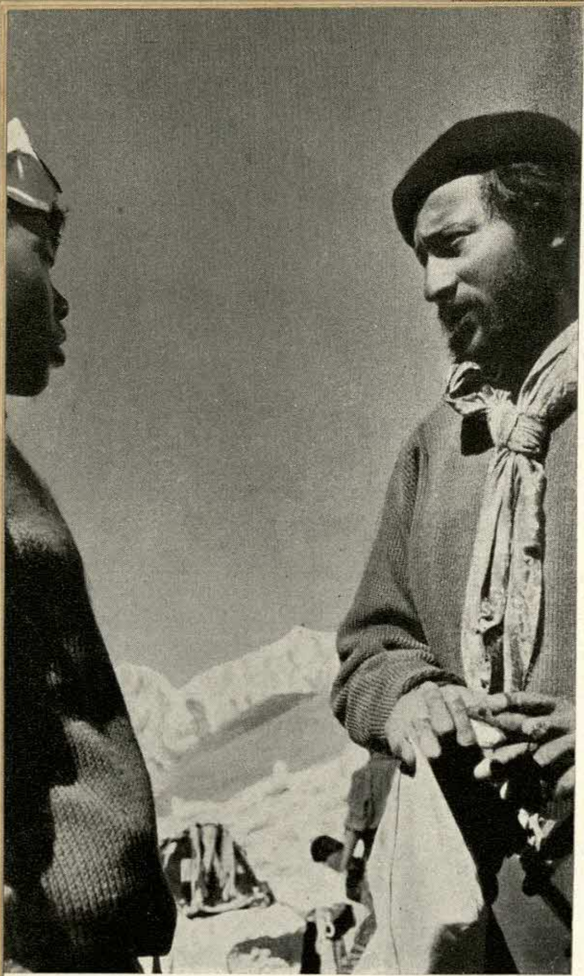




Opp. Page:
On our way back 'Skeleton Alley' looked very different.

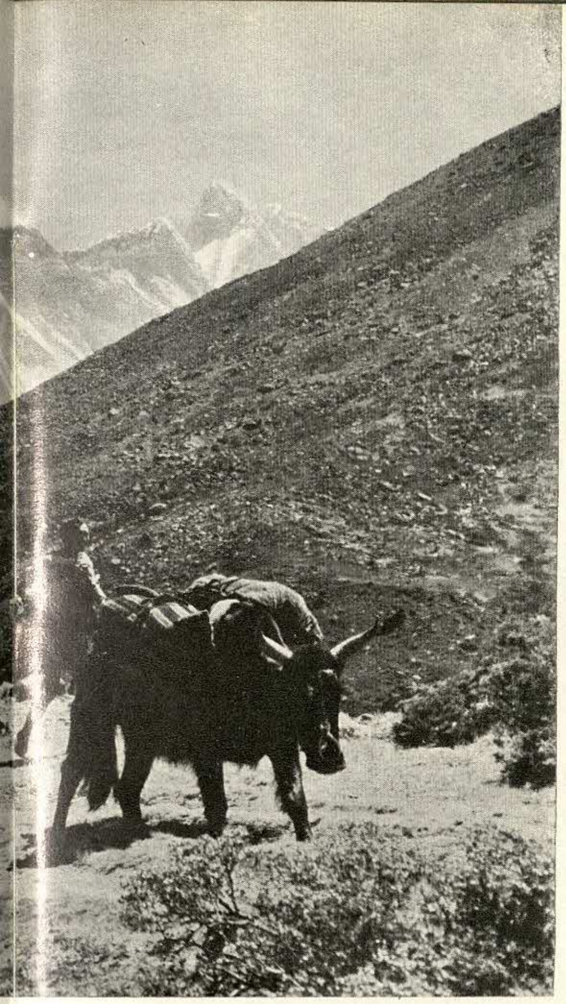


Bala in an ice-cave near the Base Camp











Sue gives Hari an injection

(Left) Hari rides a yak back to Thyangboche

They carried to Camp VII (27,650 ft.) : Left to right : Mingma Tshering, Assistant Sirdar Phu Dorje I, Sirdar Ang Tharkay, Da Norbu and Ang Tshering

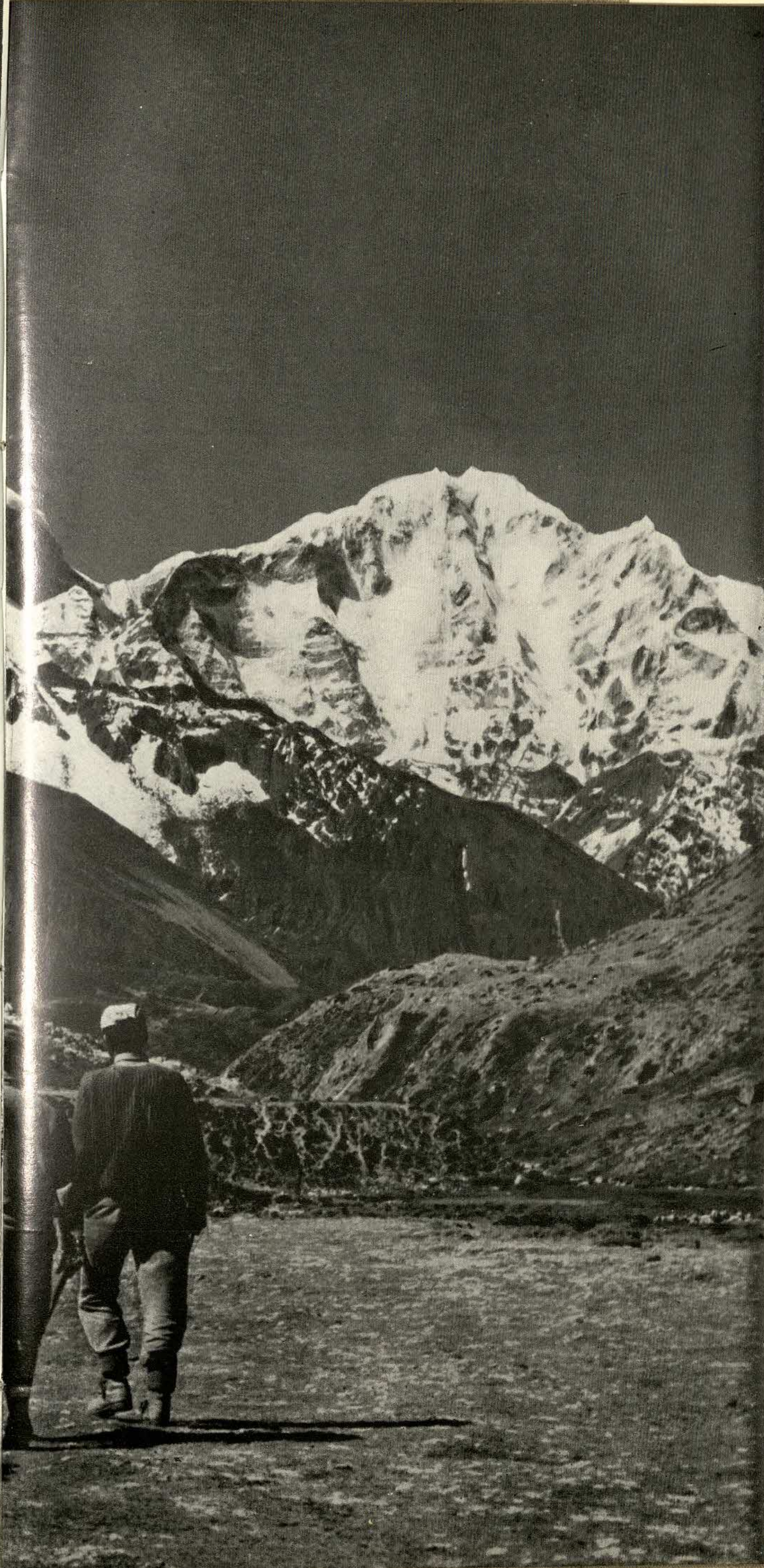


Opp. Page:

(Above left) Chow congratulates Phu Dorje II, who along with Siku Phorche made South Col from Camp III (21,100 ft.) in eight hours to save Nima's life

(Below) Last breakfast at Base Camp. Left to right : C.P., Sumi, Mulk Raj, Chow and Sonam. Behind Sonam (raising his right arm) is Vaid.





How wonderful to feel grass under one's feet again, to see high alpines, to hear the sound of running water and the songs of birds!



Pheriche on the way back

RETROSPECT

The adventure was ended, though not the story. That would be a part of us for ever. We had struggled as a team and had succeeded in mastering obstacles and fears. Success or failure on the mountains is a subjective matter—the way you look at it. To ourselves, we had succeeded, for in trying to climb Everest, we had once more conquered ourselves, our fears and our pettiness. As for the summit of Everest, that is a gamble in which the weather holds all the trumps. It was enough for us that our summit team, whom all the members had worked hard to place within striking distance of the peak, had wrested by dint of determination whatever was possible from the weather's reluctant hands.

Apart from the objective considerations of success and failure. we have much to cherish and remember from our months on the mountain. There is the aroma of burning juniper wood, the crunch of crampons, the ring of ice-axes, the clang of the piton hammer, the feel of the rope, the spirit of well-being and companionship. There are also the beautiful high alpines, the green pastures, the exotic hill birds and the shy animals. There are our Sherpas who worked and laughed with us open-heartedly and whom we had come to know, to love and to understand. They, too, had given of their best. These are all, wonderful and cherished memories.

There is the vision of Ang Tharkay, an old man radiating strength and honesty. Sumi, a teen-ager, who spent three nights on the Col and would have carried a load higher had there been any loads left. Hari, a brooding intellectual, shares with mules the ability to carry any load. Later, he was to remain confined in a hospital, the toes of both his feet badly frost-bitten. For several weeks, Nima shared the room in the hospital with him while being treated for an enlarged heart.

In a dash from Camp III, two young Sherpas, Phu Dorje II and Siku Phorche, had made the South Col, without oxygen, in just eight hours and had brought Nima back the next day—a feat unprecedented in the saga of Everest. They carried up a light aluminium evacuation chair which is still there, probably the only useful article amidst all the litter on the South Col. Guru seemed to flourish literally on thin air and nonchalantly spent six nights on the South Col without oxygen. Amongst us, he is the one who really 'sees a heaven in a wild flower'. Mulk Raj returned to Camp V even after the exhaustion of the first ferry, to help Nima and the assault group down. O. P. always remained calm and gentle under the worst circumstances. Sue spent

forty-five days at Camp III performing multifarious duties. Without him there, my administrative burden would have been considerably heavier. Chow was an example of unselfishness and *bon homie.* Sonam, a giant of a man with a Henry VIII laugh and appetite, was very strong, but always gentle as only the very strong can be. K. P. worked conscientiously so that we might all be well-equipped. Mohan's balance, physical and mental, saved his rope-mates more than once. C. P. exemplified contented effort without caring about reward or results. Jungal's over-flowing good cheer kept us all amused. We had often climbed together and I admire his strength and technique. Ashoke could be relied upon for a word of cheer and for sound advice when things were going wrong. Our signallers, Balakrishnan and Vaid, did all the unpleasant work of detail and still smiled. Both ferried through the Icefall without any previous mountaineering training, just to give members a chance of an extra day's rest. Nawang Tshering's last words to me were that he regretted his inability to carry to the top camp. This showed the spirit which most of our Sherpas had developed.

These are the memories which will linger with us when Everest is a vague landmark in the failing memory of old men. These and all other human emotions that Everest inspired, all the other persons who helped to give us this four-month sojourn among the mountains of Nepal and the hills and valleys of our own minds, are as much part of Everest as the summit we did not reach.

The helicopter about to take off from Thyangboche with Hari and Nima





“’Bye Hari, ’Bye Nima! See you in Delhi”

APPENDIX I

Notes on Preparation

An undertaking the size of an Everest expedition requires detailed and systematic preliminary planning. This was, however, the second Indian expedition to Everest and we had at our disposal all the planning data of Brigadier Gyan Singh's 1960 expedition. Besides, there were the excellent books by Brigadier Sir John Hunt and Dr. Albert Eggler.

The problems facing the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, who were sponsoring the expedition, and the leader, at this stage were :

Selection of a team ;

Selection of a Sherpa Sirdar and high-altitude Sherpas ;

Oxygen ;

Equipment ;

Food ;

Fuel ;

Meteorological reports ; and

Packing plan.

Selection of a Team

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation had detailed records of experienced Indian climbers and a study of these helped in selecting a team of fourteen, including two doctors. (Please see Appendix II for details of the team.)

Selection of a Sherpa Sirdar and High-Altitude Sherpas

The day after I was offered the leadership of the Everest Expedition, I wrote a letter to Ang Tharkay asking him to be our Sherpa Sirdar.

Ang Tharkay was now a big road contractor in Sikkim and had not been into the mountains since 1956. I explained to him that financially he would be the loser, but if he wanted "a good climb with a good team" he was welcome. He replied at once, saying he would be delighted to come.

The selection of the high-altitude Sherpa team was done in consultation with the Sirdar. We decided to take fifteen Darjeeling Sherpas and thirty from Solo Khumbu. Engagement of the Darjeeling Sherpas was no problem, but that of the Solo Khumbu Sherpas did present one. There were many expeditions coming out to the Himalayas in 1962 and unless we put in a bid for good Sherpas immediately, we may have been left with inexperienced ones. I decided to send Jungal to Solo Khumbu in December to book the Sherpas we wanted. Thanks to him, we had a good high-altitude Sherpa team. Jungal was also made responsible for arrangements for porters from Jaynagar to Base Camp.

Oxygen

We used exclusively French equipment with a modification to the mask assembly which prevented the main oxygen inlet valve from freezing. Our thanks are due to Dr. Jung Marmet (one of the four Swiss climbers of Dr. Eggler's team who made the summit of Everest) for his help and advice which enabled us to develop this modification.

I handled the oxygen problem myself with K. P. to assist in all correspondence and Mulk Raj in the transportation, checking and distribution on the mountain.

Equipment

Mohan was made responsible for all indigenous equipment. This entailed close liaison with our ordnance factories as well as with various private firms.

Our ordnance factories had done a fine job for the 1960 expedition and, after a series of trials based on constructive criticism, they did even better in 1962. Considering they only started manufacture of mountaineering equipment two years back, their achievement is really outstanding. The ordnance factory worker was a very important cog in the vast machinery of preliminary planning. During hurried visits to these factories, I was struck by the cheerfulness and willingness of these workers. They felt thrilled to be associated with the Everest expedition. Our thanks go to each one of these men.

K. P. handled the ordering, transportation and clearance of all foreign equipment. This meant a large amount of paper work since it involved foreign exchange, import licences and customs clearance. I saw the most mysterious-looking forms of various colours, each required to be submitted at least in quintuplicate. K. P. also looked after the 'woollies'.

Gurdial, assisted by C. P., was in charge of photography and all photographic equipment. Gurdial was also made responsible for a host of miscellaneous items—anything from tiny nails to big steel trunks.

Medical planning and packing was done in Bombay by Ashoke and Sue. They had catered for the approach and return march, for Base Camp, and high altitude camps separately. Each member was given a personal medical outfit with detailed instructions as to how to use it. The doctors also issued instructions regarding various injections and precautions that were to be taken which, of course, no one took.

For inter-communication between Base Camp and Kathmandu, we took a SCR 694 set which is worked by a pedal-driven generator. For the mountain itself, we had French VHF walkie-talkie sets which had been tested for both pressure and temperature up to 27,000 feet.

Food

The purchase, bulk-breaking and packing of food was handled by O. P., Sumi and Hari. Food was divided into three main sections—approach and return march food, low altitude food and high altitude food. Local purchase was the responsibility of Chow and Sonam. Local Sherpa requirements had been ordered by Jungal during his December trip.

Fuel

The fuel plan was to use juniper at Base Camp, kerosene oil on the Icefall and the Cwm, and butane gas on the Lhotse Face, the South Col and Summit Camp. The Sirdar was responsible for the juniper wood supply, C. P. for kerosene oil and K. P. for butane gas.

Our kerosene oil was put into bright yellow polythene containers which, besides being leak-proof and easy to carry, also lent a touch of colour to our approach march and mountain camps.

Meteorological Reports

Weather is an all important problem on Everest as it dictates every move on the mountain. The Meteorological Department of India had very kindly agreed to broadcast three daily weather reports as well as a weekly forecast. Our chief concern was the approach of the monsoon and the possibility of a pre-monsoon lull, the ideal time to try for the summit. A giant mountain massif the size of Everest 'makes' its own local weather, so a forecast cannot always be accurate, but westerlies can be and were accurately forecast.

All India Radio agreed to broadcast five minutes of classical music after the morning and afternoon reports. We must record our thanks to the announcers for a fine selection of music and for not going off the air till a movement was completed.

Packing Plan

A packing plan is essential to ensure the minimum reshuffling of loads on the mountain. All loads required at Base Camp and on the marches were made into sixty-pound porterable loads. Those that were to go beyond Base Camp were made into a sixty-pound load in two sub-loads—one of forty pounds and the other of twenty pounds. At Base Camp this enabled us to have ready forty-pound loads or two twenty-pound loads to take on to the mountain with no repacking. All equipment, food and fuel for the South Col and above were marked in red. Block numbers were allotted to equipment, oxygen, food and fuel, so that those responsible could easily check their loads on the march and on the mountain. A 'Master' list was made out showing the number and contents of each load. Numbered porter discs were also allotted to each load. There were mumbles of "too much damned paper work", but I felt that this was a necessary evil at this stage.

The Air Force very generously gave us five rooms in their Central Vista Officers' Mess in New Delhi. I decided to use one as an office-*cum*-store room, two for equipment and two for food.

Our target date for completing packing was the 11th of February as my intention was to send all the expedition baggage by trucks to Lucknow on the 12th with Jungal in charge, and from Lucknow to Jaynagar by rail.

I called Sirdar Ang Tharkay and Assistant Sirdar Sonam Girmi to Delhi a week before we left, to meet all the other members and also to know and understand the packing plan. Both of them and our signallers were to accompany Jungal with the baggage up to Jaynagar.

APPENDIX II

The Team

Inst. Lt. M. S. Kohli :	Mohan	(30)	— Deputy Leader — Navy.
Mr. Gurdial Singh :	Guru	(38)	— Doon School.
Mr. Sonam Gyatso :	Sonam	(39)	— Civil Servant.
Flt. Lt. A. K. Chowdhury :	Chow	(27)	— Air Force.
Mr. Hari K. Dang :	Hari	(27)	— Doon School.
Capt. A. B. Jungalwala :	Jungal	(28)	— 6/8 Gorkha Rifles.
Mr. K. P. Sharma :	K. P.	(32)	— Navy.
Mr. C. P. Vohra :	C. P.	(28)	— Civil Servant.
Capt. Mulk Raj :	Mulk Raj	(29)	— 2 Parachute Regt.
Mr. O. P. Sharma :	O. P.	(27)	— Sanawar School.
Mr. Suman Dubey :	Sumi	(19)	— St. Stephen's College, Delhi.
Dr. A. N. D. Nanavati :	Ashoke	(42)	— Haffkine Institute, Bombay.
Capt. (Dr.) M. A. Soares :	Sue	(31)	— 60 Parachute Field Ambulance.
	Average Age : 31.		

In addition to the fourteen members, we had two signallers Mr. Balakrishnan and Mr. Vaid to man our Base Camp—Kathmandu link. The Government of Nepal had attached Mr. D. B. Rai as our Liaison Officer.

Inst. Lt. M. S. Kohli : Mohan (30), joined the Navy as an Instructor Officer in 1954. He started mountaineering in 1956 by doing the basic course at the H. M. I. A little later, he joined the advanced course and went with an Eastern Karakoram expedition led by Maj. Jayal.

In 1959, Mohan organised a Naval expedition to Nanda-Kot (22,510 ft.) in which he, along with K. P. Sharma, succeeded in reaching the summit. He was a member of the first Indian expedition to Everest, led by Brigadier Gyan Singh in 1960, and went up to the South Col. He led an expedition to Annapurna III (24,858 ft.) in 1961 and, teamed with Sonam Gyatso and Sherpa Sirdar Sonam Girmi, scaled this unclimbed peak.

Mohan was appointed Deputy Leader by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

Mr. Gurdial Singh : Guru (38), a teacher at the Doon School, Dehra Dun, was a member of Mr. Jack Gibson's expedition to Bandar-Punch (20,720 ft.) in 1950 and went over 19,000 feet. He organised an expedition to Trisul (23,360 ft.) in 1951 and climbed the peak with Mr. Roy Greenwood and Dawa Thondup. He accompanied Maj. Jayal on his expeditions to Kamet (25,447 ft.) in 1952 and 1953. He went trekking in Upper Garhwal and Western Tibet in 1954. He joined Maj. Jayal's successful expedition to Kamet in 1955 and climbed Abi-Gamin along with a member and three porters.

In 1956, Guru led an expedition to Mrigthuni (22,490 ft.) that did not succeed. He climbed in the Scottish Hills and Lake District in 1957 during which year he taught at Gordonston. He headed a second expedition to Mrigthuni in 1958 and climbed the peak along with two members and two porters. He trekked up to the Kumaon-Tibet border in 1959 and conducted an expedition to Devisthan I in 1960. He led an expedition to Nanda Devi in 1961 and climbed Devisthan I and Maiktoli with some other members of his team.

Mr. Sonam Gyatso : Sonam (39), who is holding a civilian appointment under the Government of India, was in the first basic course that passed out from the H. M. I. in 1954 and participated in the advanced course to Nanda Devi (25,645 ft.) led by Maj. Jayal. In 1958, he took part in Mr. Bunshah's Cho-Oyu expedition and himself reached the summit with Pasang Dawa Lama.

Sonam was a member of the Indian expedition to Everest in 1960 and, along with Capt. N. Kumar and Nawang Gombu, reached a height of 28,300 ft. He accompanied Lt. Kohli's expedition to Annapurna III in 1961 and climbed the peak with the leader. Later, the same year, he led a successful expedition to Khangchengyau (22,700 ft.) and himself reached the peak along with two others. In 1961, he was awarded Padma Shri for his mountaineering achievements.

Flt. Lt. A. K. Chowdhury : Chow (27), who was commissioned into the Air Force in 1956, did the basic course at the H.M.I. in 1957. He later joined Maj. Jayal's Nanda Devi expedition in 1957 and climbed up to 22,000 feet. In 1959, he went with Air Commodore S. N. Goyal's Air Force expedition to Chaukhamba I (23,420 ft.) and succeeded in getting to the top with three others. He was a member of the Indian expedition to Everest in 1960 and Capt. Kumar's expedition to Nilakantha in 1961.

Capt. A. B. Jungalwala : Jungal (28), who was commissioned into the Gorkha Rifles in 1955, trekked in the Valley of Flowers and the Hemkund region of the Garhwal Himalayas in 1954. He did the basic course at the H.M.I. in 1958 and the advanced course in 1959. As a member of the Indian expedition to Everest in 1960, he reached the South Col and spent three consecutive nights there. He accompanied Inst. Lt. Kohli's expedition to Annapurna III in 1961.

Mr. Hari Dang : Hari (27), who is an Assistant Master at the Doon School, Dehra Dun, did a lot of trekking in the Himalayas from 1947 to 1951. He accompanied an expedition to Black Peak (20,956 ft.) in 1952, and another to Nandakhat (21,690 ft.) in 1953. He did some trekking in the Kumaon and Garhwal Hills from 1955 to 1958 and went up to the Nanda Devi sanctuary. He was a member of Mr. Gurdial Singh's expedition to Nanda Devi in 1961 and was among those who climbed Devisthan I and Maiktoli.

Mr. K. P. Sharma : K. P. (32), who belongs to the Navy as Chief Yeoman of Signals, did the basic course at the H. M. I. in 1955 and later did extensive trekking in the Almora and Garhwal Hills. He was a member of Lt. Kohli's Naval Expedition to Nanda-Kot (22,510 ft.) in 1959 and succeeded in reaching the peak along with the leader. He was also a member of Lt. Kohli's expedition to Annapurna III in 1961. He has worked as Secretary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation for about a year.

Mr. O. P. Sharma : O. P. (27) teaches at Lawrence School, Sanawar. He was responsible for organising several climbing treks for boys of the Sanawar School, and did the basic course at the H. M. I. in 1958. He was a member of Capt. Kumar's expedition to Nilakantha (21,640 ft.) and scaled this hitherto unclimbed peak along with Sherpas Phurba Lobsang and Lhakpa Giyalbu.

Mr. C. P. Vohra : C. P. (28) has been working in the Geological Survey of India since 1956. He worked on the Kumaon glaciers in 1957 and 1958, and thereafter did the basic and advanced courses at the H. M. I. He was in the Indian expedition to Everest in 1960 and reached the South Col, as a member of the second summit party.

Capt. Mulk Raj : Mulk Raj (29), who was commissioned in the Army in 1953, got himself initiated into the mountains in 1955 when he trekked in the Garhwal Himalayas and probed into the mysteries of Rupkund. He did the basic course at the H. M. I. in 1957 and later the same year accompanied Maj. Jayal's expedition to Nanda Devi. He trekked in the Garhwal-Gangotri-Jamnotri region in 1958 and the Karakorams in 1959. He did the advanced-*cum*-pre-Everest course at the H. M. I. towards the end of 1959 and went out trekking in the Badrinath region in 1960. He was a member of Capt. Kumar's expedition to Nilakantha in 1961.

Mr. Suman Dubey : "Sumi" (19), the youngest member of the team, is a student of St. Stephen's College, Delhi. He did extensive trekking in the hills around Dehra Dun and Chakrata from 1954 to 1958 and did some climbing around Baltal in Kashmir in 1960. He was a member of Gurdial Singh's expedition to Nanda Devi in 1961 and succeeded in climbing Devisthan I and Maiktoli along with others.

Dr. A. N. D. Nanavati : Ashoke (42), who took his M. B., B. S. and M. D. degrees from Bombay University in 1944 and 1947 respectively, is at present working as Assistant Director in the Department of Virology at the Haffkine Institute, Bombay. He has been interested in hiking and trekking and was a member of Lt. Kohli's expedition to Annapurna III in 1961.

Capt. M. A. Soares : "Sue" (31), who took his M. B., B. S. degree from Bombay University in 1954, was commissioned into the Medical Corps of the Army in 1956. He qualified as a paratrooper in 1957. He did the basic course at the H. M. I. in 1958 and the advanced-*cum*-pre-Everest course in 1959. He was a member of the joint British-Indian-Nepalese expedition to Annapurna II (26,014 ft.) in 1960, and had done very well.

GLOSSARY

BELAY	to secure the climber to a projection with the rope ; the projection itself.
BERGSCHRUND	a large crevasse separating the upper slopes of a glacier from the steeper slopes of ice or rock above.
CHANG	a beer brewed from rice.
CHIMNEY	a narrow vertical gully in rock or ice.
COL	depression in a mountain chain, a pass.
CORNICE	overhanging mass of snow or ice along a ridge, shaped like a curling crest of a wave and generally formed by the prevailing wind.
COULOIR	gully or furrow in a mountainside.
CRAMPON	metal frame with spikes, fitting the sole of the boot, for use on hard snow or ice; to move wearing such spikes.
CREVASSE	a fissure in a glacier, often of great depth.
CWM	an enclosed valley on the flank of a hill.
ICEFALL	a frozen cascade of ice, often on a gigantic scale, created when a glacier passes over a change of angle or direction in the slope of ground beneath.
MORAINE	accumulation of stones and debris brought down by the glacier.
PITON	metal spike with a ring or hole in the head, which can be driven into rock or ice and which is used in conjunction with a snap-link (or Karabiner or Mousqueton) to secure the rope passing between two climbers.
ROPE	links members of a party for safety ; a party may be referred to as 'a rope'.
SERAC	tower or pinnacle of ice.
SHERPAS	hillmen stock from Eastern Nepal.
SNOW-BRIDGE	a layer of snow bridging a crevasse.
TRAVERSE	to cross a mountain slope horizontally or diagonally ; such a crossing.
YETI	an unidentified creature believed to dwell in the Himalayan mountains and nicknamed the 'Abominable Snowman'.

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